

DOUBLE ISSUE

THE Nation.

**HEALTHCARE
HANG-UPS**

The Editors • Katha Pollitt

**THE BATTLE
FOR HONDURAS**

Greg Grandin

**ON
ISAK DINESEN**

Joanna Scott

**DIVORCE
UN
STYLE**

**FORCE
ON
LE**

AUGUST 31/SEPTEMBER 7, 2009
TheNation.com

**CAN LABOR OVERCOME
UNITE HERE'S
MESSY BREAKUP?
PETER DREIER**

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Letters

Green Iran—Long May It Wave

RIVERSIDE, CALIF.

Robert Dreyfuss's "Iran's Green Wave" [July 20/27] is excellent and gives us the mindset of the various groups in Iran. It provides the kind of information leaders need before entering into negotiations or making policy decisions. I share Dreyfuss's belief that the colored revolutions in the Russian sphere of influence and Lebanon had foreign influences, but I have no suspicions that the opposition candidates in this election had connections with foreigners. PERVERSITY CASEY

Men on Adultery

MINNEAPOLIS

Thank you, thank you, JoAnn Wypijewski. You made me see my tittering over the Sanford affair as misanthropic sneering—not that I regret it in light of the fact that Sanford is a Republican ["Carnal Knowledge," July 20/27]. What a shame it would have been if *The Nation* ran the usual mainstream feminist demand for compulsory monogamy. You made the magazine a place where radicals can take liberals head-on. DOUGLAS PRESLER

NAPERVILLE, ILL.

It is sickening to watch even liberal journalists inveigh against the adultery of men like Governor Mark Sanford. Their tone of moral condemnation comes so easily because condemnation of marital infidelity is, along with blind patriotism in wartime, among the most stubborn of our orthodoxies. Liberals and progressives needn't talk of the "sin" of adultery; they point to the deception, the breaking of the marital vow to love and honor until death. Rather than promising to love each other forever, couples should swear that they *feel* today that they will. That's all people can honestly do. Then marriage is on solid, rational footing—a project to be worked at by imperfect, changing people who love each other. JOE McKEOWN

letters@thenation.com



Michael Jackson

OAKLAND, CALIF.

Tributes to Michael Jackson are important, but so is a frank look at the tragic and troubling aspects of who he was and what he did. As she does so often, Patricia Williams has zeroed in on something key in "Mirror Man" ["Diary of a Mad Law Professor," July 20/27]. Her insights about the lengths to which Jackson went to produce light-skinned children tell us a great deal about the man and his life. They are also important pointers to prejudices that we need to leave behind us, and to the future of high-tech reproduction, which we need to approach with a great deal of caution. For a related comment about Jackson and reproductive technologies, see biopoliticaltimes.org/article.php?id=4763. MARCY DARNOVSKY

Center for Genetics and Society

James on Bill on Vivian on James on...

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

William Deresiewicz is right to be bemused by Vivian Gornick's bizarre outburst against both him and me ["Exchange," June 8]. I couldn't make much sense of it: I'm not sure, for instance, what Gornick means when she says that my criticism is "not grounded in the emotional undercurrents of its own moment." Essentially, the idea is that Gornick is somehow more in the real world than I am and is more politically radical than I am, even though she knows nothing about my politics, and even though if she did, we would likely have very little to argue about.

And what is she talking about when she claims me as "a champion of the now painfully inadequate realist novel"? On the contrary, I am no great lover of realism and think there is too much realism in American fiction. I have sharply criticized Tom Wolfe, Robert Stone, John Updike, John Irving

(continued on page 24)

Blue Dog Daze

Washington's August humidity seems to have induced political stupefaction among White House operatives, whose sluggish reasoning has led them to denounce progressives for criticizing

any Congressional Democrat in the healthcare debate. There's a war on, they argue, and we have limited ammunition—save it for the real enemy.

No doubt progressives need to mobilize to counter the thuggery of wing nuts—aided and applauded by Republican leaders and health industry lobbyists—trying to take over town meetings. The right should be scorned for trying to “break” the Obama presidency by stopping any reform whatsoever.

But Democrats have sixty votes in the Senate and a large majority in the House. If they were unified behind their president and their leaders, significant healthcare reform would pass. That Congress recessed without agreement on a sensible bill is mostly the result of the destructive maneuvers of a handful of conservative Democrats in the House, largely from the fifty-two-member Blue Dog caucus and their allies in the Senate, headed by Max Baucus, chair of the Finance Committee and poster child of corrupt and compromised incoherence.

Baucus, mired in unending “bipartisan” negotiations with all of three Republicans, has failed to produce a bill from the Finance Committee; what eventually emerges will probably be deeply, if not fatally, flawed. Representative Mike Ross and a pack of Blue Dogs managed to force the House Energy Committee to gut the public option, while lowering subsidies to middle-income families forced to pay higher prices to insurance companies.

The Blue Dogs come largely from rural and Southern districts, and often campaign by distancing themselves from the national party. Their support comes from voters who are conservative on social issues like guns and abortion. But on

bread-and-butter concerns, these legislators are voting with their contributors, not their constituents.

The Blue Dogs parade as “fiscal conservatives” and “moderates,” false advertising that the mainstream press mindlessly echoes. In fact, they are the epitome of a Washington captured by moneyed interests.

They aren't working to ensure that healthcare reforms are paid for; they are laboring on behalf of insurance companies to protect their obscene profits. The Blue Dogs are maneuvering on behalf of Big Pharma to make sure the government won't negotiate reasonable drug prices. They're doing their best to derail reasonable tax hikes on the affluent, hikes that would make insurance affordable for working- and middle-class families. Even on the Blue Dogs' signature issue—the “pay-go” rules, which they insist must be passed into law—they exempt reductions in the estate tax on the wealthiest Americans and, of course, the cost of any military adventure whatsoever.

White House officials apparently think these legislators can be bought off one by one, and fear that offending Blue Dogs en masse might raise their price. More destructively, they care far more about passing something called “comprehensive healthcare” than about what is in the actual legislation. Focus on those who oppose any bill, they urge. Let us make the best deals we can in the back rooms.

The problem with this strategy is that the lobbies own the back rooms. We saw evidence of that when Big Pharma announced that Obama had privately agreed to sustain the most outrageous Bush handouts to the drug companies.

The White House call for progressives to ignore these Democratic obstruction-



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ists is not much different from Lyndon Johnson telling Martin Luther King Jr. to halt civil rights demonstrations in a South ruled by segregationist Democrats. Change never comes from following such advice.

What the country needs—what *Obama* needs, whether he realizes it or not—is an independent, mobilized, progressive citizens' movement that takes on the corporate lobbies, from Big Pharma to Big Oil to Wall Street; challenges the legislators who are in their pockets; and demands affordable national healthcare, renewable energy, empowerment of workers, regulation of Wall Street and more. That movement should go after the conservatives and the compromised in both parties—anyone who stands in the way of reform.

The obstruction by Republicans and the right is real and must be opposed. But so should the back-room guile of the moneyed lobbies and their Democratic allies. If we are going to get the change we need, progressives will have to challenge those in both parties who can't see which way the wind is blowing.

Money for Nothing

Quite a media hullabaloo was raised when the *New York Times* recently reported that Citigroup's head energy trader, Andrew Hall, was possibly collecting a \$100 million bonus for the profits his group earned last year—most, though probably not all, of it made trading on the price of oil. Hall is one of those independent-minded, nervy traders who generate enormous profits when they are right. But even if he has lost money on balance in 2009, it is unlikely he would have to return any of that huge bonus. That's because Wall Street employees have a very sweet deal: it's heads I win, tails you lose.

COMMENT

What has everyone especially up in arms, however, is that Citigroup is still a ward of the state, as the *Times* put it. The government has a 34 percent stake in the bank holding company, which received some \$45 billion in bailout money. People are understandably furious that the money is being used to finance these outside bonuses. But what should really have the public upset is that these star traders and bankers do not deserve the money in the first place, bailout or not.

Many of us feel this in our guts. But now some mainstream economists have gathered serious evidence to support the case. They find that big profits on Wall Street, and the big bonuses they fund, don't reflect the value these firms add to the economy. They would add just as much through accessible and cheap financing and innovative investment vehicles, at much lower levels of profit and individual compensation.

In one study, Thomas Philippon of NYU and Ariell Reshef of the University of Virginia examined financial innovation and comparative worker compensation in the financial industry since the early 1900s; their paper was published by the National Bureau of Economic Research. The authors put together a sophisticated benchmark to analyze the pay in finance compared with pay for those who work in other professions and have comparable abilities, experience and education, among more sophisticated

This week at TheNation.com

News & Analysis

Jeremy Scahill: Blackwater founder implicated in murder

William Greider: Obama's rancid deal with Big Pharma

Antony Loewenstein: Gaza in conflict

Blogs: Melissa Harris-Lacewell: Conservatives channel the Joker

Slide Show: Health Reform Now!

Poll: How do we calm down the anti-healthcare reform mob?

Web Letters: Express yourself!

Noted.

ZION-ISM: Some years ago **Sidney Zion**, our friend and sometime contributor but mostly critic (usually about matters related to Israel), who died on August 2 at age 75, wrote for *The Nation* an obituary of the country's leading obituarist, **Alden Whitman** of the *New York Times*. In it Sidney quoted **Ben Hecht** (whom, along with **A.J. Liebling**, **Ring Lardner**, **Damon Runyon**, **Walter Winchell** and First Amendment absolutists **William O. Douglas** and **Hugo Black**, among others, he once identified as his alma mater) eulogizing a departed colleague at the *Chicago Journal* in 1920:

We know each other's daydreams
And the hopes that come to grief
For we write each other's obits
And they're Godalmighty brief.

Sidney wrote for *The Nation* about the First Amendment and sports, but for everybody else (including the *New York Post*; the *Times*; the *Soho Weekly*; *Harper's*; *Scanlan's*, a magazine he founded with Warren Hinckle in the early 1970s; the *New York Observer*; and the *New York Daily News*) he wrote about everything else. In recent years he wrote mostly about hospital negligence (which he believed to be responsible for his daughter's tragic death—and brought a historic lawsuit to prove it), those he called “the smoke fascists,” Israel's friends and foes, and his favorite Jewish gangsters (especially **Meyer Lansky** and **Israel Schawartzberg**).

Of course, it's as impossible to sum up Sidney in 300 words as it would be in 3,000 or 300,000, for that matter. As Sid would have said, “Fuggeddaboutit.”

So fuggeddaboutit, but not about Sid. As **Chris Calhoun**, who once sold ads for *The Nation* and is now a literary agent, wrote in the course of his review of one of Sidney's five books, *Trust Your Mother but Cut the Cards*, apropos of Sidney's comment “The next time I hear that phrase [political correctness], I reach for my revolver”: “Somewhere, Justice Douglas is smiling.”

In its obit of Sidney, the *Times* (with whom he had a love-hate relationship) called him Runyonesque. But as Sid himself once

wrote, “Anybody who knows the way to Gallagher's bar and has the phone number of a bookmaker qualifies as ‘Runyonesque.’” Yes, he was a guy who entranced more than his share of dolls, but he was also, for better or worse, an intrepid uncoverer of plots against everyone from Lansky, to **Julius and Ethel Rosenberg**, **Roy Cohn**, **Alger Hiss** and himself—scourge of the establishment, celebrator of the football Giants, the baseball Yanks, old-time music and probably too much else. In the words of his favorite crooner, he did it his way. **VICTOR NAVASKY**

A VOTE ON SINGLE-PAYER: Barack

Obama's former physician entered the healthcare reform debate on the eve of the August Congressional recess. **Dr. David Scheiner** did not endorse the public-private hybrids favored by his patient of twenty-two years or various Congressional committees; nor did he join the insurance industry-inspired mobs ranting against “socialized medicine.” Rather, Scheiner and 3,500 physicians and medical students urged the president to embrace a national single-payer healthcare system. “There are multiple problems with the present Congressional health reform proposals, but allowing private insurance to continue being involved is the most egregious,” said Scheiner. “The insurance companies actually like many of the proposed reforms, including the requirement that every American purchase insurance or suffer a tax penalty, which would be a windfall to the insurance industry. That alone should be a warning.”

Despite that warning, proposals for a genuinely public “Medicare for all” fix has gotten such short shrift that Scheiner asks, “Is the single-payer message so dangerous that it cannot even be discussed by Congress and the administration?”

As it happens, “Medicare for all” may be discussed this fall. To secure progressive votes for the House Energy and Commerce Committee's compromise plan, chair **Henry Waxman** got **Nancy Pelosi** to allow a full House vote on a single-payer plan. And **Dennis Kucinich** got the House Education and Labor Committee to amend its plan to allow states to experiment with universal public plans. Don't expect Congress to produce a single-payer system in the near

term. But keeping single-payer in the mix tips the balance in the right direction, increasing the prospect that reforms that are adopted have a robust public option. Savvy groups—**Physicians for a National Health Program**, **Progressive Democrats of America**, **Healthcare-NOW!** (which lost national coordinator **Marilyn Clement** on August 3 when she succumbed to cancer)—recognize this reality and are organizing to keep single-payer in the discussion. They're rallying to draw 10,000 “Medicare for all” advocates to hear the Senate's single-payer champion, **Bernie Sanders**, on September 12 at Wisconsin's Fighting Bob Fest, the largest annual gathering of progressives in the Midwest. **JOHN NICHOLS**

OPEN GATES: Before Henry Louis Gates Jr.

took the podium under the big white tent at the **Martha's Vineyard Book Festival** on August 2, a woman turned to her companion and at an elevated decibel level announced, “I don't care for the way he brought race into it.” Thirty minutes later, “it”—“the incident,” “the arrest”—was utterly pardoned, everyone in the audience was smitten and nobody kvetched. At one point, Gates pointed to **Alan Dershowitz** and joked, “Stick around, Alan. Don't go running off to defend O.J. I'm the flavor of the month.” The crowd went wild. About Officer **James Crowley**, his “newest friend,” Gates quipped, “I offered to get his kids into Harvard...if he doesn't arrest me ever again.” Again, to much applause. After chronicling his family's Caucasian heritage—he is descended from an Irish king—Gates declared, “Affirmative action cannot be race-based. It must be class-based. Poverty in this country is colorblind.” His book *In Search of Our Roots* sold out within minutes. **BESS KALB**

LET'S DO LUNCH: Neighborhood co-ops, community gardens, farmers' markets, a streetside produce stand or a rickety crab shack—what's your most beloved food institution? Vegan, freegan, locavore, carnivore... Write us a flavorful e-mail at food@thenation.com and share your source of culinary inspiration, what you think embodies the best of our food culture. We'll publish our favorite letters in our upcoming food issue. *Bon appétit!*

variables. What did Philippon and Reshef find? That since the late 1990s, compensation has risen far faster than in previous periods, including the flamboyant and highly speculative 1920s. For more than a decade, financial pay has been up to 50 percent higher than what it would have been if it were based on what the finance industry contributes to the economy.

The results of another study, by Lawrence Katz and Claudia Goldin, both of Harvard, are more striking. They tracked the careers of Harvard College grads from three periods: the early 1970s, the early '80s and the early '90s. Katz and Goldin compared the students across many criteria: SAT scores, grade-point averages, years at work, size of families and so on. The conclusions of the study, which was published in the May 2008 *American Economic Review*, are stunning. Many more college grads have entered finance since the early 1970s than in previous years. That's no surprise. But the premium they earned over their peers in other fields was enormous. Katz and Goldin found that the grads in finance made, on average, almost 200 percent more.

Where did the money come from? As the authors of the two papers put it, this income disparity was possible over such a long period only because the financial employees shared in enormous rents earned by the industry. "Rent" is a technical term meaning financial firms generated revenue well above what is justified in terms of what they contributed to the economy's efficiency, productivity and growth. To put it another way, the financial firms would have undertaken the same activities for much less profit—and their employees would have done the same job for much less compensation. Competition is supposed to wither away such surpluses. At least that's the longstanding argument for a free market. But if this is true in other industries (and it is probably less true than is widely believed), it is clearly not so in finance.

The younger analysts made money not because they deserved it but because of a special advantage they had.

All of which raises the question: why does the financial industry make such high rents? Is there too little competition? Is it easy to cheat investors or manipulate markets? According to modern economic theory, there may be a lack of adequate information about the industry's complex products, which would give these firms a distinct and persistent advantage. Alternatively, is there simply a constant flow of inside information?

One can only hope good economists will turn more of their attention to the sources of this undue advantage. In the meantime, it is increasingly clear that these bonuses are not justified by the marketplace. They are the fruits of unfair economic privilege. The money could be far better invested elsewhere. JEFF MADRICK

Jeff Madrick is editor of Challenge magazine and a senior fellow at the New School's Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis. His latest book, The Case for Big Government, received a Pen Award for general nonfiction.

The Art of Public Space

The pedestrian piazzas being carved out from vehicular thruways at Times Square and Herald Square in New York City are testimony to the critical need for public space in our cluttered mega-cities. But public space is not merely the passive residue of a decision to ban cars or a tacit invitation to the public to step into the street. It must be actively created and self-consciously sustained against the grain of an architecture built as much for machines as people, more for commercial than common use.

COMMENT

In a word, public spaces are built, not natural; they are the result of constructive intervention rather than laissez-faire disinterest. There is an "art of public space," which requires more than no-car signs, traffic cones, concrete barriers, tables and chairs. Happily, New York possesses an urban resource ideally suited to creating public space: artists. Now that the Department of Transportation has temporarily liberated some space from automobiles—city officials will decide at the end of the year whether to extend the traffic ban—it needs to shape that space in ways that invoke democracy, attract usage and make it "public" in the deep sense of commonality, interactivity, connectivity and community. The idea of creative public space will not fail, but New York may fail to realize it.

To succeed, public space will demand greater public investment and better understanding of the role artists and the arts play in putting such investment to imaginative uses.

These notions yield two mandates. First, they call for greater public investment in public space and in the arts that help shape such spaces. And second, they call for greater understanding of the role artists and the arts play in putting public investment to imaginative uses.

The role of artists here is not just to install a sculpture, plant a garden or make a mural (although these would be nice). Rather, it is to envision a space where visitors are encouraged (but not constrained) to move in certain ways, inspired (but not

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Where Were the Birthers Born?

(A nursery rhyme sung to the tune of "Oh Where, Oh Where Has My Little Dog Gone?")

Oh where, oh where were those Birther folks born—
The folks who constantly say
That Obama's not
An American lad?
Which planet sent them our way?

Whichever planet produced folks like that
Just has to be out of sight.
But no matter whether
It's near or far,
I'll bet its leader is white.

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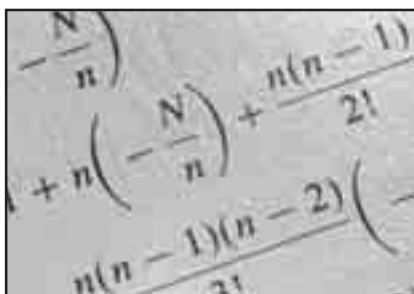
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forced) to use the space creatively, pulled (but not pushed) to feel they are helping to shape the space even as they enjoy themselves in it. The ancient agora, or civic marketplace, of democratic Athens and the covered arcades of nineteenth-century European towns exemplify a spirit where public things (literally *res publica*, the origin of our word “republic”) become paramount. Entertainment and commerce are necessary and important, but they “work” because people are drawn into public spaces for other reasons: to play in the company of others, to watch one another and see others with fresh vision (here the fabulous red stairs atop the TKTS booth at Forty-seventh Street make a splendid start), to interact with strangers, to get out of private space and into common space.

Think of Las Ramblas in Barcelona, the carnivalesque pedestrian esplanade that is the heart of the city’s cultural and commercial district, teeming with street artists and mimes as well as pickpockets and tourists, equally welcoming to the opera house and the old market (La Boqueria). Or visit the Hackesche Höfe in Berlin, where linked buildings rise around a warren of courtyards that permit small crafts factories, theaters, art galleries, restaurants and residences to coexist in an atmosphere of energetic conviviality that is both a reminder of the nineteenth century and a harbinger of the twenty-first.

Closer to home, consider Millennium Park in Chicago. The city got it right by engaging artists, designers and architects to collaborate in creating the space, with Frank Gehry’s Pritzker Pavilion, Jaume Plensa’s interactive Crown Fountain and Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate* sculpture. Together, these interactive attractions have made the Millennium Chicago’s most popular recreational and leisure destination.

Yet artistically inflected public spaces in our cities need not encompass only upscale parks and tourist destinations. In 2008 the extraordinary artist and director Robert Wilson brought a team of artists and sociologists (I was among them) to Gunpowder Park just outside London and, working with a local visionary consultancy and neighborhood residents, helped transform what had been a World War II munitions testing ground into an interactive commons. It is now widely used by the multicultural community that helped create and define it.

What might a creative blending of artistic and popular imagination come up with in Times Square? Imagine an open mini-bandstand or stage accessible to dance or theater or music groups for free performances; an erasable mural and graffiti wall for children to deface, reface and efface; a life-size chess set; molded benches where people can idle and gawk at others doing the same thing; artist installations around themes such as “recycling,” “imagination” and “childhood”; mirrors (ordinary or funhouse) to watch yourself watching others; a hollowed-out, anchored taxicab or subway car in which kids can play and others can rest; a rotating display of banners and flags designed by schoolchildren, art students and professional artists. Then add shuttle buses to other arts destinations in the city, like the Lower Manhattan arts district, where galleries and theaters like 3-Legged Dog have sprung from the ashes of 9/11; the Brooklyn Academy of Music; the Fifth Avenue museum district; or Harlem.

Here, then, is the challenge: the cars and trucks that clogged up Times Square have been sidetracked, if not quite removed.

What will fill the empty streets and turn the famous piazza into a true commons, a place whose “public” brand reflects the reality of artistic imagination and the public’s ongoing participation in the civic republic? Getting rid of the traffic was the easy part. Now comes the real work: to secure adequate funding, to enlist artists, to fill in the newly created residual void.

BENJAMIN R. BARBER

Benjamin R. Barber is Distinguished Senior Fellow at Demos in New York and the author, most recently, of Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole.

Blackwater, Black Deeds

No journalist has done more to expose the crimes, misdeeds and profiteering of the military contractor formerly known as Blackwater (now Xe Services) than *The Nation*’s Jeremy Scahill. Despite a change in the White House and conclusive evidence that the company’s hired guns massacred innocent Iraqis in the 2007 Nisour Square shootings, Blackwater is still at it—the company recently inked a \$20 million contract renewal with the State Department to provide “security services” in Iraq through September 3. Thankfully, Scahill is still at it too.

On August 4 on *The Nation*’s website (thenation.com/doc/20090817/scahill), Scahill broke an explosive story about a series of accusations two former employees made against Blackwater founder Erik Prince in sworn statements introduced into federal court. Among these allegations are that Prince and his employees “murdered, or had murdered, one or more persons who have provided information, or who were planning to provide information, to the federal authorities”; that Prince “views himself as a Christian crusader tasked with eliminating Muslims and the Islamic faith from the globe”; and that he “encouraged and rewarded the destruction of Iraqi life.” The men are identified in court papers as John Doe No. 1 and John Doe No. 2; their identities have been sealed because, as Doe No. 2 puts it, “Mr. Prince’s management has personally threatened me with death and violence.” The statements were submitted to the Eastern District of Virginia District Court by attorney Susan Burke, who, along with the Center for Constitutional Rights, is suing Blackwater on behalf of its Iraqi victims and their families.

Scahill’s article and subsequent appearances on *Countdown With Keith Olbermann*, among other outlets, captured the attention of VoteVets.org, which called on Congress to “investigate the allegations contained in the sworn declarations.” Vocal critics of private military contractors in Congress are eager to do just that. Representative Dennis Kucinich told Scahill, “In addition to Blackwater, we should be questioning their patrons in the previous administration who funded and employed this organization.” And Representative Jan Schakowsky wrote a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urging her “not to award further contracts to Xe and its affiliates and to review all existing contracts with this company.”

Alexander Cockburn

Myth, Meth and the Georgian Invasion

A year ago, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili sent Georgian troops into South Ossetia on a murderous rampage, with civilian casualties put by Irina Gagloeva, the spokeswoman of South Ossetia, at 1,492. Much lower numbers have been offered by Western sources. Georgian soldiers butchered their victims with great brutality. Kirill Benediktov, in his online book on the invasion (http://war080808.ru/book/war080808_book.pdf), reports that these soldiers were equipped—so subsequent searches of bodies and prisoners of war disclosed—not only with NATO-supplied food packages but with sachets of methamphetamine and combat stress pills based on MDMA, *aka* the active ingredient of Ecstasy. The meth amps up soldiers to kill without mercy, and the MDMA derivative frees them of subsequent debilitating flashbacks and recurring nightmares. Official use of methamphetamine and official testing of MDMA in the US armed forces have been discussed in news stories.

There was never any serious doubt that Saakashvili, with covert US encouragement and military training and kindred assistance, started the war. In June of this year, the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* ran a piece, seemingly based on a reading of a draft report by Heidi Tagliavini, who heads the European Union's fact-finding commission on the Georgian war. Despite the subsequent stentorian denials of a much-embarrassed Tagliavini, *Der Spiegel's* editors stood by their story: "The facts assembled on Tagliavini's desk refute Saakashvili's claim that his country became the innocent victim of 'Russian aggression' that day."

Large numbers of Russian tanks were nowhere near the border of South Ossetia on August 7, 2008. According to Tagliavini's draft report, as cited by *Der Spiegel*, "The experts found no evidence to support claims by the Georgian president that a Russian column of 150 tanks had advanced into South Ossetia on the evening of August 7. According to the commission's findings, the Russian army didn't enter South Ossetia until Aug. 8. Saakashvili had already amassed 12,000 troops and 75 tanks on the border with South Ossetia on the morning of Aug. 7." To avoid causing any embarrassment to the United States and its allies on the anniversary, the EU report was withheld and will be published in September, shorn—so staffers confided to *Der Spiegel*—of unpleasing disclosures. Two British monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe corroborated *Der Spiegel's* and Russian accounts of Georgia having fired the first shots.

From the opening minutes of the five-day war, the BBC, CNN, Fox News and the other major networks bellowed in unison that this was a case of Russian aggression. Republican candidate John McCain, whose chief foreign policy adviser, Randy Scheunemann, was also a paid adviser of Saakashvili, ladled out vintage cold war rhetoric and proclaimed, "Today we are all Geor-

gians." Candidate Obama was not quite so abandoned, at least in his initial reactions, prompting some to think—erroneously—that this particular Democrat might be more rational and pacific in his foreign policy. Voices of sanity in Congress were, as usual, almost inaudible. Representative Dana Rohrabacher was a spirited exception. "The Russians were right; we're wrong," he said. "The Georgians started it; the Russians ended it."

Here we are, a year later, the windowpanes still rattling from Joe Biden's speech to the Georgian Parliament on July 23—whether assisted by a combat envelope of methamphetamine we do not know—proclaiming, "We, the United States, stand by you on your journey to a secure, free and democratic, and once again united, Georgia." In other words, the United States remains implacably opposed to South Ossetia's desire for independence and committed to Georgian claims: "Divided, Georgia will not complete its journey. United, Georgia can achieve the dreams of your forebears and, maybe more importantly, the hopes of your children." Thus did Biden express US policy in linking hands across the decades with Stalin, who forced unwilling South Ossetia and Abkhazia into an enlarged Georgia.

Biden also told the Georgian Parliament that the United States would continue to help Georgia "modernize" its military and that Washington "fully supports" Georgia's aspiration to join NATO and would help Tbilisi meet the alliance's standards. This elicited a furious reaction from Moscow, pledging sanctions against any power rearming Georgia. The most nauseating moment in Biden's sortie to Tbilisi, where he repeatedly stressed he was a spokesman for Obama, came when, on accounts in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, he brazenly lied to schoolchildren, claiming Russia had launched the invasion. Not two weeks later, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon repeated this lie in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

We should note here that from Clinton-time forward, Georgia has been regarded by the United States as strategically vital in controlling the oil pipeline to Azerbaijan and Central Asia, bypassing Russia and Iran. Also, Georgia could play an enabling role if Israel decides to attack Iran's nuclear complex. The flight path from Israel to Iran is diplomatically and geographically challenging. And Georgia is perfectly situated as the takeoff point for any such raid. Israel has been heavily involved in supplying and training Georgia's armed forces. A story in *Der Spiegel* remarked that "Georgia had increasingly made headlines as a gold mine for Israeli arms dealers and veterans from the military and the Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency." President Saakashvili boasted that his defense minister, Davit Kezerashvili, and also Temur Iakobashvili, the minister responsible for negotiations over South Ossetia, lived in Israel before moving to Georgia, adding, "Both war and peace are in the hands of Israeli Jews."

In light of the foregoing, do you think McCain could have been worse, even as the war in Afghanistan escalates? ■



Katha Pollitt

Healthcare We Can Believe In

I am not a wonk. Usually this is not a problem. But when it comes to healthcare reform, it matters. You see, I long to dash forward, flaming sword in hand, to champion President Obama's healthcare plan. Every day I get e-mails from Health Care for America Now, Organizing for America, MoveOn.org and similar groups urging me to write my Congressman, attend a town-hall meeting, host a gathering. But how can I speak knowledgeably about a plan that does not yet exist and in which the parameters keep shifting?

I'd like to tell people, Obama's plan is great—for example, it has a public option that will insure those who can't afford private coverage, help rein in the insurance companies by competing with them for members and drive down drug prices through forceful negotiation. But maybe the final bill won't allow the government to negotiate drug prices, because that's the price of Big Pharma's support, which apparently the Obama administration negotiated for in secrecy. Maybe it won't even have a public plan; it will have insurance co-ops instead. And then, maybe, I should say those will be just as good, as Rahm Emanuel's brother, Ezekiel Emanuel, the MD/PhD bioethicist, says.

OK, but what are insurance co-ops? I poked around online for fifteen minutes and discovered that they're untested, small, unregulated, that they exist in twenty states and that Senator Kent Conrad of North Dakota really likes them—but I didn't discover what they actually are. I understand "public option," and "public" has a good, strong ring to it—it says, Healthcare is a right, part of the common good, something everyone should have, and if you can't afford it in the marketplace, the government will provide it. "Insurance co-op" speaks a whole other language, of commerce and complexity and exclusivity.

Sarah Palin puts forward crazy lies about how "Obama's death panel" will euthanize Trig Palin and the elderly; right-wing radio hosts like Rush Limbaugh talk about socialism and compare Obama to Hitler. We respond with wonkery: burdens lifted from small business, the unsustainability of rising costs. But people who would believe Obama wants to kill Grandma are the last people who'll respond to rational economic arguments. They are too irrational and, let's face it, too ignorant. The retirees ranting about the evils of government healthcare don't even get that the Medicare they rely on is a government program.

Whatever happened to, um, health? Wasn't that a big part of the original case for reform? The 46 million uninsured, the 20,000 people who die every year for lack of medical care, the studies showing that people without insurance get worse care than those with it, even after car crashes? Where are all those people with infuriating stories of being denied essential care by insurance company bureaucrats, and those who thought they were covered when they weren't, and those who were hit with huge bills because of fine print in their contracts? What about

the people who can't quit their jobs because they need the insurance? The people who struggle and sacrifice to pay enormous premiums? The people who cut their pills in half to save money, or who can't afford them at all? And what about doctors? My internist and gynecologist no longer even take private insurance because of the endless hassles and frustrations. Why don't we hear more about how fed up doctors are with the status quo?

Listening to the radio earlier this summer, I heard a 59-year-old nurse named Robin Batin testify in the most heart-rending way before the House subcommittee on oversight and investigations, chaired by Representative Bart Stupak. When she developed invasive breast cancer, her insurance company, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, rescinded her coverage because of a pre-existing condition—dermatitis—even though her dermatologist called to say it was acne, not, as the company claimed, a precancerous condition. Stupak confronted the heads of Assurant Health, UnitedHealth and WellPoint with the fact that there are some 1,400 conditions that can be used to cancel a policy, most of them so minor and obscure that the executives had never heard of them. Between 2003 and 2007, the three companies saved \$300 million by rescinding at least 19,776 policies. By the time Batin finally got her surgery, her tumor had doubled in size. The Congressmen were shocked—they had no idea. Neither did I. The program? *This American*

Life. I love Ira Glass, but come on, people! "Rescission" should be a word on the tip of everyone's tongue by now.

As of this writing, it is far from clear how much of the vocal opposition to reform represents wider popular feeling and how much is a mobile mob of gun nuts, birthers and teabaggers paid for and organized by lobbyists and Republican outfits like Americans for Prosperity, Conservatives for Patients' Rights and FreedomWorks. Several polls show a majority of Americans still want reform. But polls don't mean much politically if everyone stays quiet. Where's the superb organizing the Obama campaign was famous for? Where's the pushback from the left—for the public plan, or even for single-payer? It may be a non-starter in Congress, despite the upcoming vote on Representative John Conyers's HR 676, but one thing you can say for single-payer—it's easy to explain and to understand.

Oh army of Obama supporters who swarmed the country less than one year ago, we need you back knocking on our doors and sleeping on our sofas. We need you to stand on street corners handing out fliers that explain what healthcare reform is really all about and how people can make sure it doesn't get swallowed whole by the drug and insurance companies. Surely you're not too young and strong and healthy and vegan to care about boring parent stuff like health insurance? The diss on you was always that you were infatuated with Obama's charisma and with vague notions of "change"—not with the long slog of political engagement. That isn't true, though, is it? ■





Can the labor movement overcome UNITE HERE's messy breakup?

by PETER DREIER

W never heard people with Ivy League educations insult each other so articulately," recalled Joe Hansen, president of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union.

Hansen is usually leading negotiations with giant grocery chains and meatpackers. But for the past several months he's also been trying to mediate a dispute between rival unions and their leaders: Andy Stern (University of Pennsylvania, class of 1971) and Bruce Raynor (Cornell, 1972) of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and John Wilhelm (Yale, 1967) of UNITE HERE. Since late last year, their attention—and that of the broader labor movement—has been diverted by internal squabbles that have erupted into a civil war between former friends and allies. It involves a battle over turf, ego, money, members, strategy, principles and the future of the labor movement.

Hansen met with Stern and Wilhelm on July 31, and he speaks regularly with Raynor. The discussion went well enough that they scheduled another round of face-to-face meetings for mid-August. Hansen thinks a settlement is within reach.

"Then we can all go back to doing what we're supposed to be doing," Hansen said. "Organizing workers and getting pro-worker legislation passed in Congress."

Ask any union official, labor organizer, rank-and-file leader

or labor-oriented academic—they'll all tell you the same thing: this is labor's moment.

Thanks in part to the labor movement's efforts last year, unions have an ally in the White House and a Democratic majority in Congress. Long-neglected issues that unions have supported—healthcare reform, immigration reform and especially labor law reform—are on the national agenda. If labor and other liberal groups can help Democrats expand their margin in Congress next year and mobilize to push centrist Democrats in a more progressive direction, America could be in store for the next New Deal. All agree: the stakes are high.

"We're at the most daunting moment of economic challenge in our lifetime," says Stern, the president of SEIU, the nation's second-largest union. "We need to focus all of our energy on organizing workers, mobilizing the public and passing legislation that turns our country in a new direction."

Over the past decade, labor observers agree, SEIU and UNITE HERE have been two of the most effective unions in terms of expanding membership, winning good contracts, forging alliances with community and religious groups, and helping elect progressive candidates at the local, state and national levels.

Until this past spring, UNITE HERE had roughly 440,000 members, about two-thirds of them in the hotel, hospitality and

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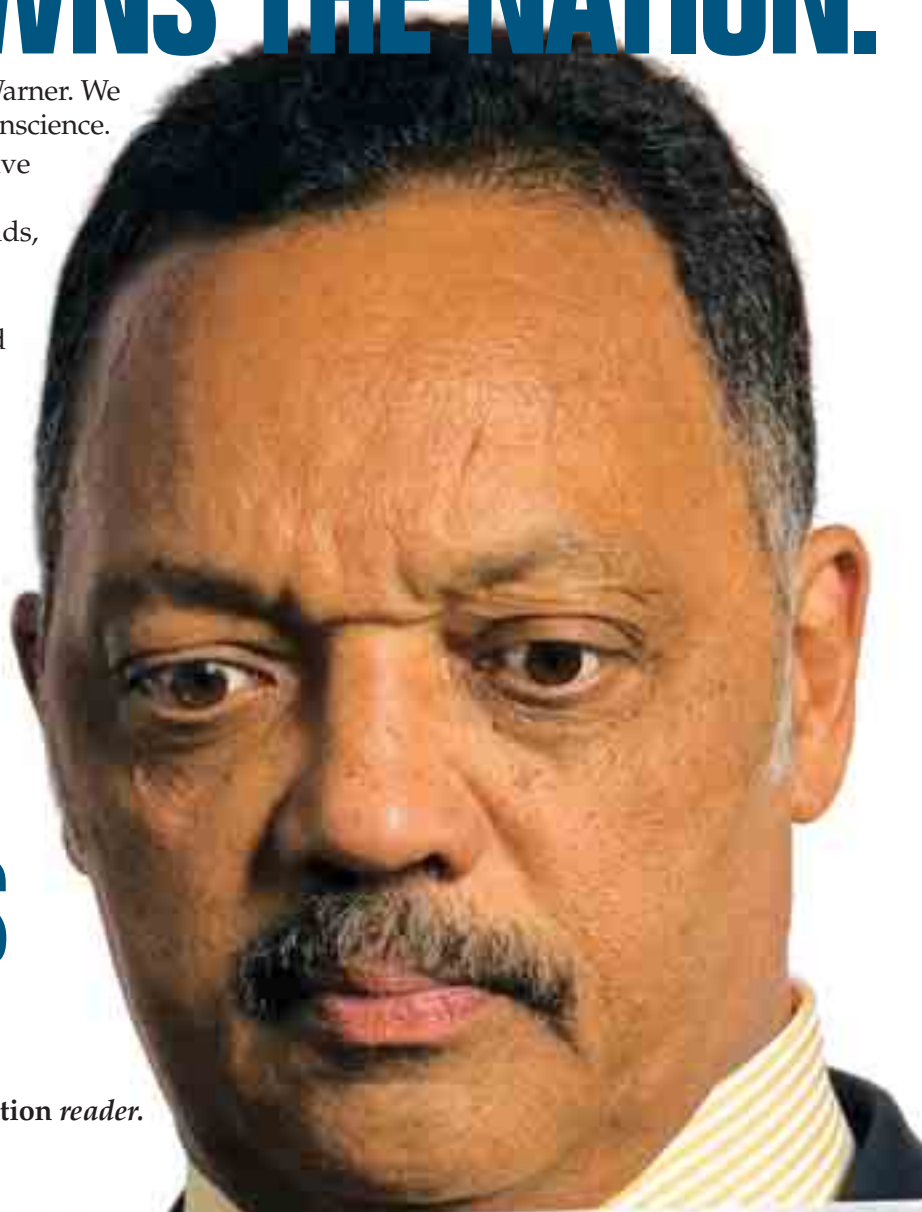
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gambling casino sectors, with most of the others in the garment industry. But in May, Raynor, UNITE HERE's president, led between 105,000 and 150,000 members, mostly garment workers, out of the union and into a new SEIU affiliate called Workers United (the two sides dispute the number). SEIU represents close to 2 million members in a wide swath of public and private sectors, including hospital and nursing home workers, janitors, security guards and government employees.

How and why SEIU wound up with these former UNITE HERE members is the source of much friction within the labor movement, causing union leaders, liberal academics and rank-and-file members to choose sides. Wilhelm and UNITE HERE accuse Stern, Raynor and SEIU of poaching their members and money. Raynor says he is just taking out what UNITE brought into the 2004 merger with HERE.

Wilhelm joined the labor movement in 1969; Raynor and Stern in the early '70s. They hoped to change the world and reverse labor's fortunes. Unions, which had represented 35 percent of the workforce in the late '50s, were starting a steady decline as unionized factories shut down and moved overseas, businesses began an aggressive antiunion assault and unions failed to organize workers and add new members. The three baby boomer radicals were known as brilliant organizers and rose steadily through the ranks of their respective unions.

Wilhelm and Raynor knew each other casually. In 1999, Wilhelm praised Raynor at a ceremony honoring him with an alumni award from Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations. But the two didn't become close friends until 2003, when Wilhelm was leading a strike of 2,500 maintenance, clerical and food service workers at Yale University. To generate national publicity and put pressure on the Yale administration, the unions brought more than 10,000 supporters—including members of other unions, community allies, students from Yale and other universities, and political figures like the Rev. Jesse Jackson and Vermont Governor Howard Dean—to shut down a section of downtown New Haven in September of that year. More than a hundred demonstrators were arrested, including Wilhelm, Raynor and Stern, as well as AFL-CIO president John Sweeney and Douglas McCarron, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters.

Raynor says he told Wilhelm he'd help raise \$1 million to replenish the strike fund. "I called Andy, and he got SEIU to write a check for \$250,000," Raynor recalls. Soon after the strike ended, Raynor and Wilhelm began talking about merging their two unions. A friend of both leaders called their relationship a "mutual admiration society." UNITE and HERE officially tied the knot in 2004, forming UNITE HERE.

UNITE, itself the product of several previous mergers of garment and textile unions, including the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers and the International Ladies' Garment

Workers, inherited a proud tradition of progressive social unionism among immigrant workers. UNITE HERE also inherited ownership of the garment unions' substantial assets—including two large Manhattan office buildings, the nation's only union-owned bank (the over \$4 billion Amalgamated Bank) and a relatively large operating budget.

At the time, the merger seemed to make sense. UNITE's membership had been dwindling dramatically since the 1970s, as the US clothing industry shrank and Americans began importing most of their apparel from Asia, Mexico and Central America. Under Raynor—who made his reputation organizing J.P. Stevens textile workers in the South during the '70s—UNITE was servicing its members, including its many retirees, and trying, with modest success, to make inroads organizing workers at industrial laundries. But the union's future looked bleak.

HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees), in contrast, was a union on the move. Its young organizers viewed their union as part of a crusading social movement led by Wilhelm, a feisty and charismatic figure. Wilhelm began his career as a student at Yale and then helped unionize the university's

A friend called the relationship between Raynor and Wilhelm a 'mutual admiration society.' UNITE and HERE tied the knot in 2004.

clerical and blue-collar employees. Under his leadership, the union organized a successful rebuilding effort in Las Vegas hotels and casinos. HERE evolved from a highly decentralized network of local (and sometimes corrupt) affiliates to a stronger, more coherent and more effective organizing force. It focused primarily on immigrants in low-wage jobs in national hotel chains and the growing number of gambling casinos. But despite its growth, HERE was starved for cash and lacked the financial resources to expand as quickly as Wilhelm thought was possible in the booming hotel and casino sector.

After the merger, Raynor became president of the new UNITE HERE, with Wilhelm assuming the leadership of its hospitality division, the sector where the union was anticipating the most growth.

In 2005 Stern, Raynor and Wilhelm led their unions—along with the Teamsters, the United Food and Commercial Workers and several others—out of the AFL-CIO and formed another union umbrella, Change to Win, which pledged to devote more resources to organizing new workers and reorganizing the labor movement along industry sector lines so that it could be more effective in challenging global corporations.

Within three years of the merger, however, Raynor and Wilhelm were clashing over the pace of change and, some longtime HERE leaders claim, Raynor's heavy-handed leadership style. Wilhelm's aides say Raynor offered employers weak "sweetheart" contracts so the union could add new members and employers could avoid a protracted fight, bad publicity and a possible strike.

Peter Dreier is a professor of politics and director of the Urban and Environmental Policy program at Occidental College.

Raynor claimed that Wilhelm's division was spending tens of millions of dollars without significant results. He thought Wilhelm's progress in adding new members was too slow and that his organizers spent too much time developing rank-and-file worker committees in a handful of hotels and casinos rather than waging campaigns against entire chains.

In fact, UNITE HERE did make fitful progress in expanding its membership. Following the merger, according to Wilhelm, UNITE HERE organized almost 14,000 workers in ninety-two hotels. It increased the union's density to about 20 percent among hotel workers (much higher in some cities), making inroads in cities like Phoenix and Houston that had no union hotels. The union also expanded its hold in the casino sector, reaching about half of all employees.

In many situations, UNITE HERE won victories by mobilizing support from community and religious allies, putting pressure on employers to recognize the union. UNITE HERE also retooled its strategy to focus on winning contracts with national chains like Hilton rather than negotiate separately with hundreds of local hotels. According to the union, UNITE

Divorces are even messier when there's a third person involved, and in this triangle, the 'other man' is SEIU and its president, Andy Stern.

HERE represents 37 percent of Hilton employees and 40 percent of Starwood hotel workers. A source who knows both union leaders well says that Raynor began going behind Wilhelm's back, meeting with hotel owners and challenging Wilhelm's role as head of the union's hospitality wing. "Bruce was president, so he could do that," the source observed, but it violated the spirit of the merger. "That ruffled the feathers of the HERE folks."

Longtime staffers for both unions, and other observers, acknowledge that the two organizations had very different cultures. One high-level staffer in Raynor's circle called the marriage "a bad fit from the very beginning."

In many cities, HERE locals joined forces with UNITE locals, merging office space, sharing their treasuries and waging campaigns under the new banner. But the former UNITE central staff remained in their Manhattan headquarters, and former HERE core staff continued working out of their Washington office.

The marriage lasted for five years. Because HERE came into the merger with more members, it had more votes on UNITE HERE's governing board, making it likely that Wilhelm loyalists could outvote Raynor on various matters and, if need be, oust Raynor as president. Worried that he might lose his position, Raynor began saying privately, then publicly last year, that the merger hadn't worked. In May, Raynor precipitated what he calls a "divorce." He resigned as UNITE HERE president and brought his wing of the union into the waiting arms of Andy Stern. Raynor's

Workers United faction is now a subsidiary of SEIU. (Some former UNITE members, mostly in New England, opted to stay with UNITE HERE.)

Anyone who has gone through a messy divorce, or has seen close friends or relatives engage in a hostile battle over the custody of children and financial assets, will recognize what UNITE HERE is going through. Divorces are even messier when there's a third person involved, and in this love-hate triangle, the "other man" is the powerful SEIU and its president.

At its July convention in Chicago, Wilhelm was elected president of UNITE HERE, minus the members Raynor brought into SEIU. Wilhelm isn't happy about losing those members and their dues, but he's mostly angry about two other issues—UNITE HERE's financial assets and protection of his union's core jurisdiction, the hospitality industry.

As he was preparing to leave as UNITE HERE president, Raynor sought to arrange for Workers United to maintain control over UNITE HERE's financial assets, including Amalgamated Bank and its strike fund. Wilhelm claims that what happened isn't a divorce but a "robbery." He says that Raynor, with Stern's support, split the union in violation of its bylaws, taking most of UNITE HERE's assets, including \$23 million of the strike fund, which Raynor had invested in the bank. According to Wilhelm, Raynor tied up most of UNITE HERE's \$333 million in assets, leaving Wilhelm with only \$4 million to keep his union afloat. These resources legally still belong to UNITE HERE, Wilhelm says.

Raynor counters that UNITE had brought those assets into the merger and that they belong to its members, who are now part of SEIU/Workers United. "These are the assets built from the sweat and savings of hundreds of thousands of garment workers over eighty years," says Raynor, who believes they should belong to the union that represents the next generation of clothing workers. He also says that the members who left UNITE HERE had the legal right to do so, citing federal laws that allow workers to disaffiliate from a union.

Raynor's critics question why a declining clothing workers union should keep everything its previous and older members amassed, when those resources could be used to build a union with a more promising future. Raynor says that those assets will be used to organize workers in the commercial laundry and food service sectors, where both Workers United and UNITE HERE have made inroads among mostly immigrant employees.

Raynor and Wilhelm are now the principals in a lawsuit over these resources, a legal conflict that could take years to resolve.

Equally contentious is the battle over union jurisdiction. To some labor activists and their academic allies, Stern, with Raynor's collaboration, committed several cardinal sins in labor circles—trying to steal another union's members, interfering with another union's organizing drives and competing for new members on another union's turf.

Soon after Raynor left UNITE HERE, Workers United began aggressively recruiting UNITE HERE members in

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The Two-State Illusion

Would it solve the Middle East problem?

There seems to be almost universal consensus that in order to bring peace to the Middle East the creation of a Palestinian state is unavoidable. What is more, such a "solution" is the policy of the United States.

What are the facts?

The lesson of Gaza Israel is surrounded by enemies. In previous *hasbarah* (educating and clarifying) messages we made clear that a Palestinian state would be impossible for Israel to accept. It would lead inevitably to Israel's destruction. The reason is primarily the lesson learned from the Gaza experiment. Under pressure from most of the world, Israel evacuated Gaza, displacing hundreds of families who had lived there for generations and who had built substantial communities and extensive agricultural installations. Instead of making even the least gesture of acknowledgment and gratitude, the Palestinians, almost from the very first day of their "liberation" from the hated Jews, began to lob rockets into Israel. Ultimately, Israel was forced to defend itself against those attacks and invaded Gaza in force. There was much damage and many casualties. As could be expected, "world opinion" condemned Israel's defensive action and called it "disproportionate."

If Israel were foolish enough to yield to the unrelenting pressure and were to turn Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") over to the Palestinians, it would find itself surrounded by enemies, whose ultimate goal is not the creation of a Palestinian state but the destruction of Israel – to use the common rhetoric, to wipe Israel off the map and push the Jews into the sea.

Statehood opportunities rejected. The reality is that the Palestinians are not really interested in their own independent state. Such a state never existed and the concept of a "Palestinian" people is a fairly new one. If the Palestinians were really interested in their own state, if that were their aspiration, they could have had such a state side-by-side with Israel, for a very long time. The first partition of Palestine – all of which, by the Balfour Declaration and by the mandate of the League of Nations was to be the Jewish home – occurred in 1921. Winston Churchill, who was then the Colonial Secretary, split the mandated territory, allocating the great bulk to the Arabs for the creation of what is now the Kingdom of Jordan. But, of course, that did not satisfy the Arabs. After much bloody fighting over the

decades, other efforts were made to create an additional state for the Arabs (who by then called themselves "Palestinians"). There was the Peel Partition Plan of 1937, and, most importantly perhaps, the United Nations Partition Plan of 1947. Under the UN plan, the territory west of the Jordan River was to be split, with the major portion to be allocated to the Arabs and the smaller, disconnected, portion going to the Jews. Jerusalem, a bone of

contention, was to be "internationalized" – it would not belong to either. The Jews, anxious to form their state, accepted this plan under which they were granted only a small fraction of the "Palestine" that they had been promised to be their homeland by the Balfour Declaration and by the mandate

"...the ultimate goal is not...
a Palestinian state...
but the destruction of Israel."

of the League of Nations. But the Arabs rejected the partition out of hand. Almost the same day that Israel declared its statehood and its independence, six Arab armies invaded Israel from north, east and south. In what could be called a Biblical miracle, the ragtag Jewish forces defeated the combined Arab might.

Following the Six-Day War of 1967, in which Israeli forces defeated the combined invasion forces of Egypt and Syria, Israel offered generous terms for the formation of a Palestinian state. But it was not accepted. Instead, the Arabs convened in Khartoum (Sudan) and pronounced their famous Three No's: No peace with Israel, No negotiations with Israel, No recognition of Israel. Other offers of statehood were made over the course of the years. Ehud Barak, then prime minister of Israel, and U.S. President Bill Clinton offered the Palestinians almost total withdrawal to the 1967 armistice lines. The Palestinians rejected the offer, presumably because it did not include Israel's willingness to accept hundreds of thousands of Palestinian "refugees," who would with one stroke accomplish what the Arabs had not accomplished in their wars: the destruction of Israel. The creation of a Palestinian state could have been accomplished many times. But it is the unalterable goal of the Palestinians, indeed of most Arabs and most Muslims, to destroy the Jewish state and never to recognize and legitimize Israel in whatever shape and size as a Jewish state.

It is important to understand that the creation of a Palestinian state is not the true ultimate goal of the Arabs. It is, at best, meant to be a stepping stone toward the ultimate goal: the destruction, the disappearance of Israel and of the hated Jews from any portion of what they consider "holy Muslim soil." The Arabs are not interested in putting an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. That could have been accomplished long ago. On the contrary, to be martyrs is a source of pride and assurance of victory to the Arabs. They compare their willingness to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of their own with the Zionist enemy, who is concerned about combat losses or even the fate of one single abducted soldier.

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several cities, including Detroit and Los Angeles. Workers United sent them fliers in the mail and made live and automated phone calls to their homes, attacking Wilhelm and UNITE HERE, and encouraging them to join the new subsidiary of SEIU.

Angela Reid, a bartender at the Glendale Hilton Hotel near Los Angeles and a loyal member of Local 11, one of UNITE HERE's most militant and successful locals, remembers getting a phone call at home at 10 in the morning.

"I work late, so I was still sleeping," she says.

The caller identified himself as being "from your union." He told Reid that members aren't happy with Wilhelm, that Local 11 leaders don't care about the members and that they need new leadership. And he urged her to vote against a proposed dues increase to expand the strike fund in anticipation of upcoming contract talks.

"I got angry," says the 30-year-old Reid, a union activist. "I told him, 'What you guys are doing is terrible. You should be ashamed of yourselves. Don't call my home again.' Then I hung up." For three more weeks, she got at least ten robo-

A growing number of labor leaders are calling on Stern, Raynor and Wilhelm to end the internal fighting for the sake of the broader movement.

calls at her home and on her cellphone, all with the same message.

She also received several leaflets in the mail accusing Local 11 of ignoring workers' grievances and "actively discouraging workers from supporting the Employee Free Choice Act." The leaflets also accused Wilhelm of "mismanagement," urged members to "tell your local union leaders to support an end to the merger" and to vote against a dues increase, and directed workers to a website that asked them to "send greedy union leaders a message."

"I got so mad I ripped them up and threw them in the trash," recalls Reid.

At work, her fellow members told her that they'd gotten the same calls, some of them in Spanish. "I tried to explain to them what was going on. We'd only been union for less than a year. The calls and leaflets were confusing people."

"Look, thanks to Local 11 we have a great contract," Reid says. "It took us over three years to win it, but we did it. They trained us to help ourselves, to be leaders. We got a big raise. We have free family healthcare and paid vacations. Since we got a contract, management is afraid to harass us like they used to. They don't step on us anymore."

"I have nothing against SEIU," says Reid. "They do great things with janitors and nurses and other healthcare workers. That's what they should be doing. But they have no business in our business. They're not hotel workers. I don't want to wear a [SEIU] purple shirt. I want to wear [UNITE HERE's] red."

Wilhelm claims that Raynor used funds he still controlled from UNITE HERE's treasury to recruit its members to

another union. Wilhelm also claims that under the new Workers United banner, SEIU has sought to recruit workers at hotels and casinos in Phoenix; San Antonio; Erie, Pennsylvania; and other cities where UNITE HERE had been organizing employees. In several cases, he says, SEIU had already pressured management to agree to a card-check neutrality agreement. In addition, Wilhelm says, forty to eighty SEIU organizers have been soliciting UNITE HERE members at fifteen airports who are employed by Delaware North, a food and beverage operation, asking them to sign "decertification" petitions and leave UNITE HERE.

Stern views the battle as a tug of war between different factions of UNITE HERE for the loyalty of its members, but he admits that some of the attacks on Wilhelm's division "went too far." He says that SEIU has ended its harassment of UNITE HERE workers in an effort to end the battle. Wilhelm claims that it is still going on.

In retaliation, UNITE HERE engaged in harassment of Workers United. Wilhelm wrote letters to employers urging them not to negotiate new contracts with Workers United locals and not to forward dues to those locals. In the Bay Area, laundry and food services company Aramark, citing Wilhelm's letter, has refused to start contract talks with its unionized workers at three of its industrial laundry plants, claiming that it doesn't want to get in the middle of an intra-union dispute. Workers United claims that in late July, UNITE HERE organizers were still making house calls to workers and leafleting at laundry factory gates almost daily.

Maria Munoz, a union shop steward who folds bags at a 120-worker laundry plant in Los Angeles owned by Angelica Corporation, said that in June a UNITE HERE organizer was leafleting outside the factory, urging workers to renounce their membership in Workers United. "She even visited me at home and kept calling me," said Munoz. "I told her we're not members of [UNITE HERE] Local 11. We're members of [Workers United] Local 52. I asked her to leave me alone, and she finally did."

The charges and countercharges between SEIU and UNITE HERE have been flying through e-mails, press releases, open letters and websites for the past few months. Each side has lined up supporters among unions, civil rights groups, clergy and academics, repeating the accusations and escalating the rhetoric.

But in recent weeks, a growing number of labor leaders have started to speak out, calling on Stern, Raynor and Wilhelm to end the internal fighting for the sake of the broader labor movement. The tone of neutrality has begun to shift, too. Even some of Stern's long-term allies within the labor and academic communities say that he "crossed the line" by siding with one faction in an intra-union dispute and bringing another union's members into SEIU. More than 200 academics signed a letter to SEIU's executive board criticizing the union's "concerted efforts to undermine UNITE HERE." (Disclosure: I signed a version of this letter.)

A controversial figure in the labor world, Stern is perhaps the best known and most powerful union president in the country since the United Auto Workers' Walter Reuther. Stern has a close relationship with President Barack Obama, as evidenced by his frequent visits to the White House, and he is playing a leading role in labor's efforts to enact healthcare reform, the Employee Free Choice Act and immigration reform.

Stern has increased SEIU's visibility and established what he calls "our brand," including getting all the union's locals—once a crazy quilt of different names—to adopt the same purple colors for their T-shirts and caps. Under Stern, SEIU has spent its sizable war chest putting organizers into political campaigns and providing contributions to Democrats. This political clout has helped SEIU win contracts for many government employees, a significant proportion of its membership.

As SEIU's organizing director and, since 1996, as its president, Stern has expanded the union's membership by organizing workers and by absorbing smaller unions. Indeed, he had talked to Raynor and Wilhelm about bringing UNITE and HERE into SEIU long before the 2004 merger.

But Stern's tactics—including the recent ousting of the leadership of a large Northern California local, his battles with the California Nurses Association and his overtures to Wal-Mart—have alienated some onetime allies. Because of his high profile and, in recent months, his role in the UNITE HERE dispute, some critics call Stern "imperialistic."

Others, however, argue that the conflict is over differences in organizing strategy—portraying SEIU's approach as top-down and UNITE HERE's as bottom-up. There is some truth to this distinction, but it is also misleading. For example, SEIU's famous Justice for Janitors campaign, as well as its efforts among security guards, were models of rank-and-file bottom-up organizing.

In July, in a direct rebuke to Stern's role in the UNITE HERE dispute, the presidents of twenty-seven national unions signed a statement "in solidarity with Unite Here" that pledged to "support Unite Here, both materially and morally, against a raid by any union against Unite Here members, or workers in Unite Here's industry jurisdictions." They also promised to support UNITE HERE in its fights with employers, especially if an employer were to force a strike or lockout.

Wilhelm says he's prepared to do battle "on the ground" through membership organizing drives if Workers United tries to recruit workers on UNITE HERE's turf. He's also willing, he adds, to fight through the courts, even if it takes years, to get back what he considers the union's financial assets, especially Amalgamated Bank.

Interviewed separately, Wilhelm, Stern and Raynor all agree that the lawsuits, legal fees, negative publicity and other aspects of the conflict are wasteful and should come to an end.

Stern and Raynor want Wilhelm to agree to binding arbitration to settle the jurisdictional and financial issues. But Wilhelm says, "If someone breaks into your house and steals your belongings, and then gets caught, you don't arbitrate how much he has to return to its rightful owner." Wilhelm says he's ready to negotiate with Stern and Raynor but that he's not willing to

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put his union's fate in the hands of a third-party arbitrator with final authority.

Hansen, the well-respected UFCW president, brought Raynor, Wilhelm and Stern together in March and April for a series of meetings to resolve the dispute. Initially Hansen had hoped UNITE HERE could stay together, but he soon realized that what both sides needed was a clean break to dissolve the merger.

After listening to both sides and talking with leaders from other unions, Hansen presented the three men with a list of recommendations, hoping to broker a deal. Hansen called on the two sides to agree to split the core jurisdictions. The hotel and gaming industry would stay with UNITE HERE. Apparel, laundries and other industries would go to SEIU/Workers United.

Hansen recommended dividing the responsibility for organizing food service workers—employed at convention centers, airports and office buildings, dominated by several national companies like Aramark, Sodexo and Compass. HERE brought about 60,000 food service workers into the merger, but UNITE HERE added new members, many through joint campaigns with SEIU. Hansen suggested that UNITE HERE maintain the food service jurisdiction in California, Chicago, New York and British Columbia, and agree to give SEIU the franchise elsewhere, even though both unions will be organizing employees of the same firms in different cities.

Neither side would be happy with that scenario, but Hansen thinks that it's a starting point for reaching a settlement.

The biggest obstacle to an agreement is the division of UNITE HERE's financial resources. Hansen proposed that SEIU/Workers United own the Amalgamated Bank and the former UNITE HERE headquarters building in New York City. In exchange for giving up those assets, Hansen said, "there's got to be a substantial sum of money that allows UNITE HERE to run its union." The size of that check may determine how quickly, or even whether, Hansen can forge a compromise that both sides can live with.

"If we can get down to that number," Hansen said hopefully, "we've got a solution."

Although the talks broke down in May, Hansen was able to get both sides together again in late July. They've scheduled another meeting for mid-August.

"This has gotten too emotional," Hansen said. "The bitterness between the two sides is terrible. Meanwhile, workers' lives are being screwed up. The corporations will take full advantage of this [split] and exploit them. The workers these two unions represent—and the unorganized workers they should be organizing—need the help."

"These union fights can only help business," explained Lowell Turner, a labor studies professor at Cornell University. "When your enemies are fighting each other instead of fighting you, you're in good shape. That's the way it looks to the Chamber of Commerce."

"The sooner labor stops putting millions of dollars into fighting each other," said Turner, "the sooner they can put those resources where they should go—into organizing and political battles." ■

The Case for Busting the Filibuster

It's time to abolish this undemocratic holdover from the days of slavery and segregation.

by THOMAS GEOGHEGAN

This past spring, Senator Claire McCaskill wrote to me asking for \$50 to help elect more Democrats, so we could have a filibuster-proof Senate. Now that Al Franken has finally been declared the sixtieth Democratic senator, her plea may seem moot. But even with Franken in office, we don't have a filibuster-proof Senate. To get to sixty on the Democratic side, we'll still have to cut deals with Democrats like Max Baucus, Ben Nelson and others who cat around as Blue Dogs from vote to vote. Whether or not Senator Arlen Specter is a Democrat, the real Democrats will still have to cut the same deals to get sixty votes.

Thomas Geoghegan is a lawyer in Chicago. Against his better judgment, he has a website (tomgeoghegan.com) with his other complaints, including a petition demanding that the US Senate cloture the filibuster forever.



Maybe we loyal Dems should start sending postcards like the following: "Dear Senator: Why do you keep asking for my money? You've already got the fifty-one votes you need to get rid of the filibuster rule." It's true—McCaskill and her colleagues could get rid of it tomorrow. Then we really would have a Democratic Senate, like our Democratic House.

She won't. The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, which paid for her appeal, won't. They use the filibuster threat to hit us up for money. And as long as they do, you and I will keep on kicking in for a "filibuster-proof" Senate, which, with or without Franken, will never exist. Every Obama initiative will teeter around sixty, only the deal-cutting will go on deeper in the back rooms and be less transparent than before.

In the meantime, playing it straighter than Claude Rains,

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McCaskill and other Democrats tell us how shocked, yes, *shocked* they are that this deal-cutting is going on. May I quote her spring letter? "I'm writing to you today because President Obama's agenda is in serious jeopardy..."

It still is, as long as it takes sixty and not fifty-one votes to pass Obama's bills. But no, here's what she says: "Why? Because Republicans in the Senate—the same ones who spent years kowtowing to George W. Bush—are *determined* to block each and every one of President Obama's initiatives."

But why is that a surprise, if there's a rule that lets forty-one senators block a bill? The surprise to people in other countries is that the Senate, already wildly malapportioned, with two senators from every state no matter how big or small the population, does not observe majority rule. Her next line:

"It's appalling really."

It sure is—the way she and other Democratic senators keep the filibuster in place. But let her go on:

"They're the ones who got us into this mess. Now they want

Until we dump the filibuster, Obama's initiatives will strain for the needed sixty votes, allowing the GOP and Blue Dog Dems to stymie reform.

to stand in the way of every positive thing the President tries to do to set things right. I'm sure it frustrates you as much as it does me."

Yes, Senator, it frustrates me. But Democratic senators who let this happen and then ask for my money frustrate me even more.

As a labor lawyer, I have seen the Senate filibuster kill labor law reform—kill the right to join a union, freely and fairly—in 1978 and 1994. And, no doubt, in 2010.

And in the end, all we get is a letter from Senator McCaskill asking for more money. Of course, I know there are all sorts of arguments made for the filibuster. For example: "But the filibuster is part of our country's history, and there's much to be said for respecting our history and tradition." Yes, well, slavery and segregation are also part of our history, and that's what the filibuster was used to defend. I'm all in favor of history and tradition, but I see no reason to go on cherishing either the filibuster or the Confederate flag.

Besides, that's not the filibuster we're dealing with. The post-1975 procedural filibuster is entirely unlike the old filibuster, the one Mr. Smith, as played by the unshaven Jimmy Stewart, stayed up all night to mount in his plea for honest government (though usually it was Senator Bullhorn defending Jim Crow). The *old* filibuster that you and I and Frank Capra and the Confederacy love so much was very rare, and now it's extinct. No one has stood up and read recipes for Campbell's Soup for decades. In 1975 Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, in his role as president of the Senate, ruled that just fifty-one senators could vote to get rid of the filibuster entirely. A simple majority of liberals could now force change on a frightened old guard. But instead of dumping

the filibuster once and for all, the liberals, unsure of their support, agreed to a "reformed" Rule 22. It was this reform that, by accident, turned the once-in-a-blue-moon filibuster into something that happens all the time. The idea was to reduce the votes needed to cut off debate from sixty-seven, which on the Hill is a big hill to climb, to just sixty. Liberals like Walter Mondale wanted to make it easier to push through civil rights and other progressive legislation. What's the harm in that?

The only problem is that, because the filibuster had rendered the chamber so laughable, with renegade members pulling all-nighters and blocking all the Senate's business, the "reformers" came up with a new procedural filibuster—the polite filibuster, the Bob Dole filibuster—to replace the cruder old-fashioned filibuster of Senate pirates like Strom Thurmond ("filibuster" comes from the Dutch word for freebooter, or pirate). The liberals of 1975 thought they could banish the dark Furies of American history, but they wound up spawning more demons than we'd ever seen before. Because the senators did not want to be laughed at by stand-up comedians, they ended their own stand-up acts with a rule that says, essentially:

"We aren't going to let the Senate pirates hold up business anymore. From now on, if those people want to filibuster, they can do it offstage. They can just file a motion that they want debate to continue on this measure indefinitely. We will then put the measure aside, and go back to it only if we get the sixty votes to cut off this not-really-happening debate."

In other words, the opposing senators don't have the stomach to stand up and read the chicken soup recipes. We call it the "procedural" filibuster, but what we really mean is the "pretend" filibuster.

But the procedural, or pretend, filibuster is an even worse form of piracy, an open invitation to senatorial predators to prey on neutral shipping, to which they might have given safe passage before. After all, why *not* "filibuster" if it's a freebie—if you don't actually have to stand up and talk in the chamber until you're not only half dead from exhaustion but have made yourself a laughingstock? That's what post-1975 senators began to do. In the 1960s, before the procedural filibuster, there were seven or fewer "old" filibusters in an entire term. In the most recent Senate term, there were 138.

At least with the old filibuster, we knew who was doing the filibustering. With the modern filibuster, senators can hold up bills without the public ever finding out their names. No one's accountable for obstructing. No senator runs the risk of looking like a fool. But while they're up there concealing one another's identity, the Republic is a shambles. And now, with a nominal sixty Democratic votes, the need for secrecy as to who has put everything on hold may be even greater than before.

"But just wait till 2010, when we get sixty-two or sixty-three Democrats." I'm sure that's what Senator McCaskill would tell me. "So come on, kick in." But Senator, where will they come from? They could come from bloody border states like yours (Missouri), or from deep inside the South. The problem with the filibuster is not so much that it puts Republicans in control but

that it puts senators from conservative regions like the South, the border states and the Great Plains in control. The only true filibuster-proof Senate would be a majority that would be proof against those regions.

An astute book published in 2006, Thomas Schaller's *Whistling Past Dixie*, argued that to craft a presidential majority Democrats don't need the Southern vote. That may be true (although it turned out that Barack Obama made historic inroads in the South, winning three states there). But there is no way to whistle past Dixie when a non-Dixie presidential majority tries to get its program through the Senate. After 2010, we could have sixty-four Democrats in the Senate and still be in bad shape.

A filibuster-proof Senate, then, is a conceptual impossibility. Even with a hundred Democrats, a filibuster would still lock in a form of minority rule. Because among the Democrats there would arise two new subparties, with forty-one senators named "Baucus" blocking fifty-nine senators named "Brown."

Here's another argument for the filibuster: "If we get rid of it, we'll be powerless against the Republicans when they're in charge." That's why we need it, they say: we're waiting for the barbarians, for the nightmare of President Palin. People in the AFL-CIO tell me this even as the filibuster keeps the right to organize a union on ice and union membership keeps shrinking.

Or as a union general counsel said to me: "Everyone here in the DC office would be freaked out completely if we lost the filibuster. They think it's the only thing that saved us from Bush." Inside the Beltway, they all think it's the filibuster that saved those of us who read Paul Krugman from being shipped off to Guantánamo. Really, that's what many people on the left think. "If Bush ever came back, we'd need it."

Of course Bush, or a Bush equivalent, will come back—precisely because Obama and our side will be blocked by the filibuster. Obama is in peril until he gets the same constitutional power that FDR had, i.e., the right to pass a program with a simple majority (at least after Senator Huey Long finally ran out of words). But let's deal with the canard that the filibuster "saved" us from Bush. What's the evidence? Judicial nominations: that's the answer they give. Go ahead, name someone we blocked. Roberts? Alito? Of course there's Bork, whom we blocked in the 1980s. But we didn't block him with a filibuster.

Think seriously about whom we really stopped. Look, I'm all in favor of opposing atrocious right-wing nominations, and I admit that the filibuster, or at least the GOP's refusal to nuke it, did keep some appellate and district courts free of especially bad people. But I can tell you as a lawyer who does appellate work, who has to appear before these judges, it makes little difference to me if we lose the filibuster. All it means is that instead of a bad conservative, I end up with a *really* bad conservative. Either way, I still wind up losing.

I think I can say this on behalf of many liberal lawyers who appear before appellate courts: if we could give up the filibuster and get labor law reform or national health insurance, I'd put up

with a slightly more disagreeable group of right-wing judges. We'll take the heat.

The fact is, as long as we have the filibuster, we ensure the discrediting of the Democratic Party and we're more likely, not less, to have a terrible bench.

Sure, sometimes liberal Democrats put the filibuster to good use when Republicans are in power. Sure, sometimes a liberal senator can use the filibuster to stop a piece of corporate piracy. It's impossible to prove that the filibuster *never* does any good. But the record is awfully thin. Look at all the financial deregulation that Senator Phil Gramm and leading Democrats like Larry Summers pushed through only a decade ago. The filibuster did not stop their effective repeal of the New Deal, but it would block the revival of it today.

On the other hand, Republicans and conservative Democrats use their filibusters on labor, health, the stimulus, everything. They can and will block all the change that Obama wanted us to believe in. And even when they lose, they win. For example, when we say that after a major rewriting of the stimulus package—a rewriting that seriously weakened the original bill—it

With the modern, 'procedural' filibuster, senators can hold up bills without the public ever finding out their names. No one's accountable.

"survived the filibuster," what we really mean is that it didn't.

But let's turn to the final objection: "No one in Washington cares about this. It's not on the agenda. It's a waste of time even to discuss it. What you're talking about is impossible."

What Washington insiders partly mean when they say this is, With a filibuster, any senator can stick up the Senate, and what senator is going to turn in his or her sidearm by giving up the right to demand sixty votes? That's why they're raising a million dollars a day. Otherwise, they'd be peacefully serving in the House. The right to filibuster is what makes each of them a small-town sheriff. That's why it would take massive marches in the streets to force them to give it up.

Indeed, it's hard to imagine how bloody the battle would be. The last time anything so traumatic happened on the Hill was in 1961, when the bigger procedural bar to majority rule was not in the Senate but the House. John Kennedy had just come in, and it was clear that his New Frontier program (we still didn't have Medicare) would go nowhere because of the power of the House Rules Committee chair, the now forgotten "Judge" Howard Smith. Kennedy had to enlist the Speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn, to break Smith's power to stop any bill he disliked from leaving House Rules. In the end, the battle to beat Smith probably killed Rayburn, who died later in the year.

It was an awful power struggle, and many were aghast that Kennedy had thrown away all his capital for this cause. But had he not done it, there probably would not have been a Civil Rights Bill, or certainly not the full-blown version of the Great Society that Lyndon Johnson pushed through after Kennedy's

assassination. Imagine having to fight the battle for Medicare today. Without that war on Judge Smith, what we now call the “liberal hour” would not have come.

Nor will any “liberal hour” come in our time, until we bring the filibuster down. I know it seems hopeless. But so did knocking out slavery when the abolitionists first started, or segregation, when civil rights activists began their struggle against Jim Crow. It’s a fair enough analogy, since the filibuster is one of the last remnants of racist politics in America: it was a parliamentary tactic used by the Calhounians to make extra certain slavery would stay around.

We should adopt the strategy of the antislavery movement, which in the early stages had three approaches:

1. The laying of petitions on the House. Forgive the archaic legal phrase: I mean petitions to Congress, both houses. In the era of John Quincy Adams—in case you missed the Steven Spielberg movie—there would be mass petitions, with Adams and others reading them on the House floor to the howls of the Southerners. Every group busted by a filibuster should lay on a petition. And start with the House,

which is the only place it has a chance of being read.

2. Resolutions by the House, as a warm-up for the Senate. Such resolutions might read: “Resolved, that Congress has no authority to require supermajorities in any chamber except as authorized by the Constitution.” Aren’t House chairs tired of seeing their bills cast into black holes by senators whose names they never even know?

3. Evangelizing. The most effective tactic in the fight against slavery was the preaching of New England clergy against it. We can start in our battle against the filibuster by enlisting faculty at New England colleges to hold teach-ins. Teach the kids why “Yes, we can” can’t happen with the current Senate rules.

By the way, the abolitionists knew the Senate was their enemy, just as it is our enemy today. Let’s hope these tactics work for us in getting rid of this last vestige of slavery: Senate Rule 22. What’s painful is that we have to cross some of our most sainted senators. But unless we decide to just give up on the Republic, there’s no way out. To save the Obama presidency, we may have to fight our heroes. ■

Battle for Honduras—and the Region

The coup has encouraged those who want to halt the advance of the Latin American left.

by GREG GRANDIN

Roberto Micheletti, who took power in Honduras following the June 28 coup, has come under intense criticism from the international community for rejecting a compromise, negotiated by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias, that would allow Manuel Zelaya, the democratically elected president forced into exile by the military, to return as head of a reconciliation government. But Micheletti’s obstinacy is encouraged by those who see the crisis as a chance to halt the advance of the Latin American left. A month and a half after Zelaya’s overthrow, the small, desperately poor Central American country has become the site of a larger battle that could shape hemispheric politics, including Barack Obama’s foreign policy, for years to come.

In the 1980s Honduras served as a staging ground for Ronald Reagan’s anticommunist operations in neighboring Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala and as a portal for New Right Christians to roll back liberation theology. Central America’s anti-communist crusade became something of a death-squad *Da Vinci Code*, pulling together a carnivalesque cast that included



KAREN CALDICOTT

first-generation neocons, Latin American torturers, local oligarchs, anti-Castro Cubans, mercenaries, Opus Dei ideologues and pulpit-thumping evangelicals.

The campaign to oust Zelaya and prevent his restoration has reunited old comrades from that struggle, including shadowy figures like Fernando “Billy” Joya (who in the 1980s was a member of Battalion 316, a Honduran paramilitary unit responsible for the disappearance of hundreds, and who now works as Micheletti’s security adviser) and Iran/Contra veterans like Otto Reich (who ran Reagan’s

Office of Public Diplomacy, which misused public money to manipulate public opinion to support the Contra war against Nicaragua). The Honduran generals who deposed Zelaya received their military training at the height of the region’s dirty wars, including courses at the notorious School of the Americas. And the current crisis reveals a familiar schism between conservative Catholic hierarchs and evangelical Protestants who back the coup, on the one hand, and progressive Christians who are being hounded by security forces, on the other.

Joining the coup coalition are new actors like Venezuelan Robert Carmona-Borjas, who was involved in the 2002 attempt to overthrow Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. According to Latin American analyst Laura Carlsen, Carmona, working closely with Reich, turned his attentions to Honduras after having failed to halt the electoral success of the left in Venezuela.

Greg Grandin, a professor of history at New York University, is the author, most recently, of Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford’s Forgotten Jungle City (Metropolitan). He is on the editorial committee of the North American Congress on Latin America.

Starting in 2007, Carmona's Arcadia Foundation launched a press campaign to discredit Zelaya by accusing his government of widespread graft. As Carlsen writes, the "politicized nature of Arcadia's anti-corruption offensive was clear from the start. Carmona, along with Otto Reich, charged President Zelaya of complicity" in assorted misdeeds. The crusade was similar to the way International Republican Institute-linked "democracy promotion" groups destabilized the government of Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, resulting in his overthrow in 2004.

Also fresh to the fight is Lanny Davis, a former Hillary Clinton adviser turned lobbyist, who was hired by business backers of the coup to push the Clinton State Department to recognize the Micheletti government. The Clinton wing of the Democratic Party has deep ties to Latin American neoliberals who presided over ruinous policies of market liberalization in the 1990s, now largely displaced from office by the region's new leftists. Clinton pollsters and consultants, such as Stanley Greenberg and Doug Schoen, have worked on a number of their presidential campaigns, often on the losing side.

Three years ago the region, locked into the US sphere of influence by the Central American Free Trade Agreement, seemed immune to the changes taking place in South America, which had brought leftists to power in a majority of countries. But then the Sandinistas returned to office in Nicaragua in 2006. Recently, the FMLN won the presidency in El Salvador, and Guatemala, led by center-left President Álvaro Colom, is witnessing a resurgence of peasant activism, much of it against transnational mining and biofuel corporations.

In Honduras, Zelaya shook things up by raising the minimum wage and apologizing for the executions of street children and gang members carried out by security forces in the 1990s. He moved to reduce the US military presence and refused to privatize Hondutel, the state-owned telecommunications firm, a deal that Micheletti, as president of Congress, pushed. Zelaya also vetoed legislation, likewise supported by Micheletti, that would have banned sale of the morning-after pill. Considering Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega's shameful support of the Catholic Church's position on abortion, which resulted in legislation mandating up to thirty-year jail terms for women who receive them, this was perhaps Zelaya's most courageous move. He also accepted foreign aid, in the form of low-cost petroleum, from Venezuela. It would be impossible to overstate the Central American ruling class's hatred of Chávez, whose hand is seen behind every peasant protest and every call to democratize the region's politics and economics. The president of a Honduran business council recently said Chávez "had Honduras in his mouth. He was a cat with a mouse that got away."

The fixation on Chávez usefully diverts attention from the gnawing poverty in the region, as well as from the failure of the neoliberal economic model promoted by Washington in recent decades. Forty percent of Central Americans, and more than 50 percent of Hondurans, live in poverty. The Chávez mania also distracts from the fact that under Washington's equally disastrous "war on drugs," crime cartels, deeply rooted in the military and traditional oligarchic families, have ren-

dered much of Central America into what the Washington Office on Latin America calls "captive states."

For the White House, Honduras is proving to be an unexpectedly difficult foreign-policy test. After condemning the coup, Obama handed the crisis to the State Department. Rather than working with the Organization of American States (OAS), Secretary of State Clinton unilaterally charged Oscar Arias with brokering a compromise, ignoring the concerns of most other Latin American governments that negotiations would grant too much legitimacy to the coup. Clinton has so far been unwilling to apply a range of possible sanctions, including freezing the bank accounts of those who carried out the coup, to force Micheletti to accept the Arias plan. And for those who see Micheletti as the last line against the spread of Chavismo—be it in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador or elsewhere in the Americas—the return of Zelaya, even just to finish the few months left in his term, is unacceptable.

In the late 1970s the Sandinista revolution revealed the limits of Jimmy Carter's tolerance of Third World nationalism. The more Carter tried to appease hawks in his administration, the more he was accused of vacillating, thus paving the way for neoconservatives, under Reagan, to use Central America to showcase their hard line.

A similar dynamic is taking place today. Republicans have

For those who see Micheletti as the last line against the spread of Chavismo, the return of Zelaya is unacceptable.

rallied around Micheletti, sending a Congressional delegation led by Connie Mack to visit Tegucigalpa. Taking a page out of the Latin American right's playbook, they have redbaited Obama by associating him with Chávez. Obama, said Texas Senator John Cornyn, "must stand with the Honduran people, not with Hugo Chávez." It's the kind of grandstanding that Republicans, absent a domestic agenda, have come to rely on. Venezuela's position on Honduras is identical to that of Brazil and Chile—and, for that matter, the European Union. But the right-wing attacks are effective, largely because self-described liberals repeatedly indulge in the demonization not just of Chávez, as Lanny Davis recently did, but of leftists like Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador.

In early August the State Department seemed to give ground to Republicans, stating in a letter to Republican Senator Richard Lugar that Zelaya's "provocative actions...unleashed the events that led to his removal." This statement, as well as other tepid efforts to pressure Micheletti, bodes ill for the Obama administration's willingness to stand up to right-wing pressure.

Obama himself continues to send mixed signals. At an August summit in Guadalajara of the presidents of Mexico, Canada and the United States, he complained that "critics who say that the United States has not intervened enough in Honduras are the same people who say that we're always

intervening and the Yankees need to get out of Latin America. You can't have it both ways." However, no one in Latin America is asking for unilateral US intervention but rather for Washington to work multilaterally with the OAS. By deputizing Oscar Arias, the United States effectively undermined the OAS. On the same day Obama made these remarks, South American presidents, meeting in Quito, Ecuador, reaffirmed their condemnation of the coup and said they will not recognize any president elected under the current regime—a step Clinton's State Department has refused to take.

The failure to restore Zelaya to power will send a clear message to Latin American conservatives that Washington will tolerate coups, provided they are carried out under a democratic guise. As historian Miguel Tinker Salas recently observed in an essay published on Common Dreams, they already sense that

Honduras might be a turning point. A conservative businessman recently won the presidency in Panama. In June in Argentina, Cristina Fernández's center-left Peronist party suffered a mid-term electoral defeat and lost control of Congress. And polls show that presidential elections coming up in Chile and Brazil will be close, possibly dealing further losses to the left.

In the meantime, Zelaya is rallying supporters from abroad to press for his return. In Honduras, protests continue and the body count climbs. At least eleven Zelaya supporters have been killed since the coup took place. The latest, Martín Florencio Rivera, was stabbed to death as he left a wake held for another victim. Micheletti, for his part, is hunkered down in Tegucigalpa, betting he can leverage international support to last until regularly scheduled presidential elections in November. The future course of Latin American politics may hang in the balance. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

and many others on that score and have, perhaps somewhat too evangelically, tried to extirpate realism where it is not obviously on display. For instance, my critique of hysterical realism was in part precisely a critique of one kind of American realism, in its information-loving, fact-gathering mode. Seen in this light, David Foster Wallace was, despite his literary radicalism, a kind of American social-realist, stuffing his texts with facts and figures and brand names; and one problem with a novelist like Richard Powers is that the grammar of his lumbering and conservative realism (his style) cannot keep pace with the advance guard of his ideas.

So who does Gornick mean? Perhaps she is referring to Aleksandar Hemon, or Norman Rush, or Rivka Galchen, or José Saramago, or Kazuo Ishiguro, or someone else I have written about in the last few years? The two writers who come to mind—I have indeed praised Joseph O'Neill and Marilynne Robinson—are hardly straightforward examples of realists and don't strike me, or thousands of others, as "painfully inadequate."

Despite their differences—or rather, despite Gornick's strenuous efforts to construct a phantom set of differences—Gornick and Deresiewicz agree on one thing: they both idolize, in different ways, a golden age of criticism, located somewhere between 1940 and 1965, of which I am a poor echo. Not only does this nostalgia privilege a certain tradition of politically engaged literary criticism at the expense of a tradition more formalist and aesthetic in nature (Empson, Jarrell, Nabokov, Barthes, Son-

tag, Ricks, Vendler, Pritchett, Kermode, Bloom, say); it does a disservice to what Gornick might call our contemporary emotional undercurrent, which is that we are currently in a golden age of journalistic literary criticism.

Newspapers, of course, are in deep trouble, but if we look at the quality and intellectual rigor of the long essays being written in the pages of *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Bookforum*, *Harper's*, *The New York Review*, *n+1*, *The London Review of Books*, to name only a few mainstream print journals and magazines, we have no right whatever to bemoan our current literary state, or to look fondly backward to the lost days of Kazin and Rahv. Why Gornick and Deresiewicz, who are themselves examples of this current journalistic vitality, would want to do so is anyone's guess. But it might have something to do with me...

JAMES WOOD

Three Cheers for 'Ten Things'

SANTA CRUZ, CALIF.

Kudos to Walter Mosley and his researchers for the June 29 "Ten Things You Can Do to Stimulate a New Economy" and for drawing attention to small, local financial institutions, particularly CDFIs.

The piece doesn't specifically mention community development credit unions. CDCUs offer a lifeline to low-income communities abandoned by commercial banks and targeted by high-priced check cashers and predatory lenders. And credit union members are the owners of their credit union by virtue of the democratic credit union structure—one member, one vote. I

urge all your readers to find a nearby CDCU and become a member—find one online at cdcucop.org.

One correction: in item 1 the correct name is Coalition of Community Development Financial Institutions (cdfi.org).

SHEILA SCHAT

*Santa Cruz Community Credit Union
(a triple bottom-line CDFI and CDCU)*

SAN DIEGO

I love "Ten Things"—simple and empowering. I was disappointed, however, that none of the socially responsible banks mentioned have the most essential service: ATMs!

DHAROL TANKERSLEY

PHOENIX

Your advice in "Ten Things You Need to Know to Live on the Streets" [August 3/10] was timely, wise and compelling.

Admit it—you probably suspect that a majority of your readers are educated and are, therefore, solvent. To print something that clearly implies that your readers may not, in fact, be immune to this type of peril illustrates perfectly what many of us would never have expected to confront. And since I am unemployed but still reasonably safe from homelessness, it's a powerful call to help. Once I got over the shock—and the fear—I was, once again, inspired by *The Nation*.

CRAIG RANDLEMAN

I Before E...

In Jonathan Schell's "Remembering Robert McNamara" [August 3/10], the *i* and the *e* in Jerome Wiesner's name were reversed.

Books & the Arts.

In the Theater of Isak Dinesen

by JOANNA SCOTT

Known in this country by her pseudonym, Isak Dinesen, the Danish writer Karen Blixen published her first collection of stories in 1934, at the age of 49. Though she'd returned to her family home in Denmark after spending seventeen years in British East Africa, Dinesen wrote her stories in English and secured her first contract with an American publisher. The book, *Seven Gothic Tales*, established Dinesen as a literary giant, a reputation that would be sustained throughout her life. Eudora Welty said Dinesen's fiction embodies "the last outreach of magic." Carson McCullers reported that she would reread Dinesen's memoir *Out of Africa* for comfort. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1954, Ernest Hemingway said with uncharacteristic humility that it might have gone to "that beautiful writer Karen Blixen."

But Dinesen's claim on American readers has been waning. The majority of critical books and articles on her work were published before 1990. In 1985, three years after the publication of Judith Thurman's biography *Isak Dinesen*, Hollywood jumped on board, recasting the time Dinesen spent in British East Africa managing a coffee plantation with her husband as a love story starring Meryl Streep and Robert Redford. The film, *Out of Africa*, might have generated a resurgence of interest in Dinesen's work, but instead it appears to have inaugurated a new period of critical indifference.

Dinesen, who died in 1962, was always an elusive target for readers, even at the height of her renown. As her fame spread, she responded by cloaking herself in an eccentric and mysterious persona. In his introduction to the *Paris Review* interview with Dinesen, published in 1956, Eugene Walter lists some of the legends about her: "She is really a man; he is really a woman...she is a nun; he is very hospitable and receives young writers; she is difficult to see and lives a recluse." He doesn't note the secret hidden behind the persona: Dinesen suffered for many years from ravaging syphilis, which she contracted from her

husband. But if her public identity was a calculated performance, it matched the design of her tales. When Walter asked her in the interview if she objected to readers who found her tales artificial, she responded, "Of course they are artificial. They were meant to be, for such is the essence of the tale-telling art."

These days, when the merit of fiction tends to be measured by the currency of its subjects, a confessional element in the work helps establish credibility. Reviewers try to square the antics of a writer's life with the antics in the fiction. Even satirical verbal play is too often read and admired as autobiographical expression. And thanks to the democratic exposures of the web, it's easier than ever to document private experiences and divulge the most intimate secrets. Confession doesn't leave much room for imagination except to demand its allegiance to the personal, which may leave readers less inclined to find value in the extravagant lies of fiction. It's understandable, then, but no less disappointing, that the tales of Isak Dinesen—filled with children who dream too much, fat old nobles who are devoted to revenge, nuns who are good at weaving, servants who are good at cooking—would be easy to overlook.

Here is the Cardinal speaking in "The Cardinal's First Tale," a late tale by Dinesen:

"Madame," he said, "I have been telling you a story. Stories have been told as long as speech has existed, and *sans* stories, the human race would have perished, as it would have perished *sans* water. You will see the characters of the true story clearly, as if luminous and on a higher plane, and



Isak Dinesen at the Rockefeller Foundation library, 1959

ROBERT GOLDBERG/AP

at the same time they may look not quite human, and you may well be a little afraid of them."

The Cardinal is taking it upon himself to explain, rather grandly, the impact of his story, an intricate one about a docile young princess who gradually learns the pleasures—and dangers—of independence. Though insisting on the reality of his account, the Cardinal is drawing his listener's attention to the exaggerations. A story, he suggests, is a vital form of expression: it offers not just a record of experience but also a vision of potential. And its truth is inextricably connected to its theatricality.

Throughout her writing life, Dinesen adamantly defined herself as a "storyteller." Thurman argues that this identity was based on a moral decision to align herself with the "fabulists of an older age" rather than with her contemporaries. Yet morality remains an unpredictable force as a Dinesen story unfolds. The conclusions of the tales are murky, and the motives of the heroes and heroines are questionable. Like the characters, we can't be sure whether their predicaments are defined by destiny or free will. And as they try to understand the extent of their moral re-

Joanna Scott is a fiction writer. Among her many books are Arrogance*, The Manikin and, most recently, Follow Me.*

sponsibility, the characters more emphatically inhabit their perceived identities, performing their roles with gusto. If they are beautiful to begin with, they look more beautiful. If they are old, they become impossibly ancient. If they're strange, they become stranger. They play out the stereotypes to the extreme, even as they keep surprising us with their unpredictable qualities.

Among Dinesen's strangest creations is the title character of her early story "The Monkey," from *Seven Gothic Tales*. The gray monkey from Zanzibar is a wicked little thing. When it's not watching the guests of the house with its "glittering eyes," it is in the library, "pulling out brittle folios a hundred years old and scattering over the black-and-white marble floor browned leaves dealing with strategy, princely marriage contracts, and witches' trials." Over the course of the story, the monkey disappears from the action, reappears in the background, disappears again into the darkness, reappears and, with abrupt chutzpah, transforms into a human shape, exchanging places with its owner, the Virgin Prioress.

In a tale in which this bizarre metamorphosis plays an integral part, we are invited to believe that all the elements, from the historical to the surreal, cohere. The plausibility of the account has more to do with the insistent momentum of events than with verisimilitude. And the truth of the tale lies not in any familiar, verifiable outcome but in the account it provokes. A narrative makes the effect of a baffling experience more apprehensible. When a monkey turns into a Virgin Prioress and a Virgin Prioress turns into a monkey, a good story helps us to make sense of it.

As we travel through Dinesen's tales from beginning to end, we find that her characters begin to look, as the Cardinal says, "luminous and on a higher plane." It follows that a face illuminated with an intense light takes on the quality of a mask, with exaggerated features. The Cardinal is right—these characters don't look quite human. And yes, sometimes I'm a little afraid of them.

In one of Dinesen's early tales, "The Roads Round Pisa," a young Danish man named Augustus sees a figure he takes to be a pensive, graceful boy drinking coffee in an *osteria*, and they begin to talk. Eventually, the boy is revealed to be a girl, whom we later learn is named Agnese. The story goes on to trace the girl's involvement in a complicated affair. But while they're still in the *osteria*, the two characters engage in a debate about the roles of men and women.

Agnese sets the terms, offering her opin-

ion that Adam was created by God to play the part of a guest; Eve, by default, is the hostess. It's a simplistic formula, of course, but it becomes more meaningful as the conversation continues. Agnese challenges Augustus to describe the desires of a guest. Augustus is eager to try out an answer.

A guest wants three things, he says. The first is "to be diverted, to get out of his daily monotony or worry." Second, a guest "wants to shine, to expand himself and impress his own personality upon his surroundings." And third, "he wants to find some justification for his existence altogether."

According to this arrangement, the hostess is cast as entertainer. But Augustus argues that it's not enough for her to keep a guest absorbed in the show. A hostess's diversions should provide an expansive experience. The guest wants to be able to imagine that he has a connection to the external world and may even be responsible for its design. With the help of an entertaining hostess, he's able to contemplate an expanded conception of himself. And finally, he will gain from the entertainment a heightened sense of purpose.

While Augustus is attempting to describe a paradigmatic relationship between men and women, he ends up making revealing statements about the nature of entertainment and, by implication, about the function of stories. Dinesen is suggesting in this passage that a storyteller has a set of interrelated responsibilities. She should entertain and absorb her audience, and she should offer us some insight into our imaginative abilities. Ultimately, the fiction should return us to the world with sharpened awareness of our individual potential.

Out of Africa, Dinesen's second book, is a love story, though not the one portrayed by Streep and Redford in the film. The memoir is about Dinesen's love of East Africa—the cultures, the landscapes, the animals. The feeling that saturates the book is reverence. Dinesen doesn't pretend to be an expert on the country; much of what she encounters puzzles her. But she is respectful of indigenous traditions and protective of the people.

Dinesen's typical strategy in the book is to name something, define the name by a set of associations and then unravel her own definition. One of the best examples of this involves a passage about an antelope named Lulu that was found as a fawn and raised as a household pet. Eventually Lulu did what all wild animals should do and returned to the forest to live. Occasionally she would show up at the house to eat the maize scat-

tered for her—Lulu's appearance is celebrated by Dinesen as "a free union" and "a rare, honourable thing." But mostly the antelope kept out of sight, leaving the author to imagine the animal's experience:

In Africa there is a cuckoo which sings in the middle of the hot days in the midst of the forest, like the sonorous heartbeat of the world, I had never had the luck to see her, neither had anyone that I knew, for nobody could tell me how she looked. But Lulu had perhaps walked on a narrow green deerpath just under the branch on which the cuckoo was sitting.

While the precision of the physical details is evocative, the important word in this passage is "perhaps." It reminds us that the scene of Lulu walking in the forest is the author's creation. Dinesen describes Lulu's world through the proposition of an experience that she will never witness. She doesn't claim to be accurate. Instead, she makes up a story about the antelope, filling in the gaps of her knowledge with imagined possibility. It might seem just a charming passage, without much consequence. But as she turns around the word "perhaps," Dinesen is demonstrating how a vivid version of reality can be created from a mix of description and invention.

Dinesen is a conjurer, and her signature trick as a storyteller is to mask her characters in stereotypes and then set them in motion, giving them opportunities to define themselves as individuals. She both illuminates the features of the stereotype and contrasts categorical notions of identity with idiosyncratic actions. She uses a similar method in *Out of Africa* and in a short later memoir, *Shadows on the Grass*. But the experience of reading these nonfiction works is like watching a troupe of masked actors walk out of the theater and down the street. On the stage of one of Dinesen's stories, the masks help us to understand how individuals are defined by, and in some cases cling to, the identities assigned to them by their culture. Off the stage, the characters aren't given the chance to speak for themselves and to determine their relation to the stereotypes. Consequently, the stereotypes may be startling in their bluntness. Or they may seem naïve and even express an insidious racism. The Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o called *Out of Africa* "one of the most dangerous books ever written about Africa."

"It was not easy to get to know the Natives," Dinesen writes in *Out of Africa*. She compares the people who live on her farm to wild birds: "Like the spurfowl, the Natives

might be mimicking a fear of us because of some other deeper dread." About her young cook Kamante, she says, "Nothing, I thought, could be more mysterious than this natural instinct in a Savage for our culinary art." Dinesen's representation of Kamante is perplexing. But before we throw the whole book away, it's important to follow the evolution of the stereotypes. Careful readers will find that Dinesen often recasts or reverses blunt labels. The description of Kamante is a good example. Having just declared that the culinary ability in "a Savage" can seem mysterious, Dinesen admits that she might be the "Savage" here. Though she doesn't pretend to know what Kamante is thinking, she proposes that he would "look upon the trouble that we give ourselves about our food, as upon a lunacy." If she, a white European aristocrat, has allowed herself to think of her servants as "Savages," then she is responsible for considering their perceptions of her. She ends up proving that the labels borrowed from cultural prejudices reveal more about the perceiver than the perceived.

In her tales, Dinesen trumps stereotypes with depictions of individuality. The broad categories used to define characters become mixed up with the ambiguities of private thought and public performances. In her nonfiction, she doesn't pretend to have access to the unexpressed thoughts of her characters. Instead, she willingly plays the role of the fool. She's right there in her own mask, walking alongside the troupe of actors. And with her example, she shows us that whenever we go out to look at something unfamiliar—an animal, a landscape, a culture—we end up looking back at ourselves.

Shortly after Germany invaded Poland and England and France declared war on the Third Reich, Dinesen was commissioned by an editor of *Politiken*, a Danish newspaper, to write a series of articles about life in Berlin, Paris and London during wartime. She began with a trip to Berlin, where she was welcomed by the Ministry of Propaganda and supplied with an itinerary. Denmark was a neutral country at that point, and Dinesen felt obliged to respect that neutrality in her account of the Third Reich. But when Hitler personally asked to meet her, she declined, pretending that she'd caught a cold and couldn't go out. Later she admitted, with oddly muted revulsion, that "something in the thought must have been distasteful."

Dinesen went on to write her second collection, *Winter's Tales*, during the German occupation of Denmark. The stories from this period are among her strongest, full of

what the critic Robert Langbaum calls "bottomless wisdom." And among them are her most effective examples of a politically engaged theatricality.

In the story "Sorrow-Acre," a peasant woman named Anne-Marie spends the day from sunup to sundown single-handedly mowing the field of an old lord as penance for her son, who has been accused of setting fire to a barn. The boy is never brought to trial, and his guilt remains no more than a suspicion. But still the old lord demands this sacrifice from the woman, and while she labors beneath the hot sun, he watches from the shade of his pavilion.

The old lord's nephew is witness to this and is appalled. He believes that his uncle has come to isolate himself, "to set himself apart from his surroundings, and to close himself up to all outer life.... Strange fancies might there have run in his mind, so that in the end he had seen himself as the only person really existing, and the world as a poor and vain shadow-play, which had no substance to it." Before the sun has set, the nephew has left his uncle's field. The old man changes into a brocaded suit and sips his wine. The hours pass. And with the neatness of a fable's culmination, the woman finishes mowing the field just before the sun goes down, then crumples into her son's arms and dies.

For the old lord, the woman has put on a good show. It doesn't occur to him that he's a main player in the drama. He has made a sport of murder. And when the show is over, he remains with the peasants who have followed the woman throughout the day. His isolation is so disorienting that he doesn't know whether to keep walking or stand still. He is such a pathetic figure in his lace-trimmed shirt and buckled shoes that his cruelty doesn't deserve to be remembered. The only part of the story that will be remembered, the narrator tells us, is the name the peasants give to the field: "Sorrow-Acre."

While the story "Sorrow-Acre" isn't explicitly about war, it does look closely at a tyrant's skewed power. More directly, it follows the consequences of the old lord's irresponsible performance. Here and throughout Dinesen's work, life is self-consciously performed by the characters, their actions are designed to achieve an effect and the very words they use to describe the truth inevitably have a scripted quality.

As members of the audience, we're at an advantage. We can pay attention to the costumes and masks and gestures borrowed by the characters to produce effects. We can see their mistakes, when their efforts fail to produce intended results. The more extravagant the performance, the more exposed

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the character becomes. Masks are wonderfully paradoxical in this way: while they may hide the physical reality, they can show us how a person wants to be seen.

The moral thrust of Dinesen's tales leads here, to a representation of life as performance—a necessary fiction. In her pliable and accommodating theater, the truth is found in the design of the stories we tell in order to understand whom we might become.

Throughout her career, with both the fiction and nonfiction, Dinesen is urging us to recognize the reality of the artificial. And when we really start searching for the truth in stories, we can find it everywhere, not just in sincere confessions but in the deliberate lies and imagined possibilities, the magic and fantasy and all the other unreal elements that go into the concoction of identity. ■



James Neugass in Spain, circa 1938

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVES, TAMMINT LIBRARY, NYU

La Despedida

by DAN KAUFMAN

"Who could see you and not remember you?" Federico García Lorca wrote in 1926, describing the brutality of the Guardia Civil, Spain's paramilitary police, toward his beloved Gypsies. Ten years later, at the onset of the Spanish Civil War, that brutality would be visited upon Lorca when fascist soldiers loyal to Gen. Francisco Franco executed the poet and dumped his body in a *fosa común*, a mass grave, near Granada. For decades, Lorca's insistence on remembrance clashed with

War Is Beautiful

An American Ambulance Driver in the Spanish Civil War.

By James Neugass.

Edited by Peter N. Carroll and Peter Glazer.

New Press. 314 pp. \$26.95.

Spain's post-Franco *pacto del olvido*, or pact of forgetting, an agreement between the government and the army that opened the door to democracy in exchange for a sweeping amnesty of the Franco regime. Recently, however, the pact has shown signs of unraveling. In 2007 Spain's Socialist government enacted the Law of Historical Memory, which for the first time officially acknowledges the victims of Franco's dictatorship. The law also

allows anyone with evidence of a mass grave to ask the state for help in unearthing and identifying any human remains found in it. Last October, after a decade-long effort by Spanish human rights groups, the crusading judge Baltasar Garzón ordered the exhumation of nineteen Francoist mass graves, including the one believed to hold Lorca's corpse. Yet more than seventy years after Lorca was killed, the resistance to excavating the country's repressed memory remains fierce; a week after Garzón issued his order, Javier Zaragoza, Spain's chief prosecutor, challenged it on the grounds that the judge lacked jurisdiction. Fearful that the country's Supreme Court would agree with Zaragoza, Garzón tactically withdrew his order, referring it instead to Spain's provincial courts in the hope of keeping the investigation alive.

By chance, around the same time last year an unexpected exhumation of literary remains dating to the Spanish Civil War was completed with the publication of *War Is Beautiful*, a long-lost memoir by James Neugass, a volunteer ambulance driver during the conflict. The book's publication is remarkable for many reasons, not least the survival of the manuscript. In 2000, more than fifty years after Neugass died of a heart attack in a Greenwich Village subway station and nearly as many years after most of his papers were destroyed in a cellar flood, a book dealer discovered a manuscript of Neugass's in a Vermont bookstore that was believed to have come from the collection of Max Eastman, onetime editor of the influential leftist magazine *The Masses*. It had most likely been sent to Eastman for review, and in the margins someone, perhaps Eastman, wrote, "The title, 'War is Beautiful,' is a Fascist slogan. If this is naïve and misdirected irony it is very dangerous." Five hundred pages long, an incomplete copy of the typewritten manuscript wound its way to Neugass's son Paul, and then to Peter Carroll and Peter Glazer, historians of American involvement in the conflict. The pair edited the original manuscript, now housed in a university library, and shaped it into the book published last year.

Nearly 3,000 Americans volunteered to defend the democratic Spanish Republic from a military revolt led by Franco, who was aided by Hitler and Mussolini. Shortly after the war began, the US government forbade Americans from entering Spain, so most entered the country illegally, usually by crossing the Pyrenees at night or occasionally by stowing away on small ships that embarked from France. The volunteers formed two American battalions and later became known collectively as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. A

Dan Kaufman, a musician and writer living in Brooklyn, has written about the Abraham Lincoln Brigade for the New York Times and the New York Observer.

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separate, legal organization for aiding the Republic, called the American Medical Bureau, was founded by a New York surgeon named Edward Barsky. (The bureau owed its legality to a State Department exception for groups providing humanitarian aid.) Barsky established base hospitals in churches and monasteries, and set up a mobile medical unit. At its peak strength, Barsky's staff included more than 100 doctors, nurses and drivers. Neugass, a 32-year-old poet who made his living as a fencing instructor, cook, social worker and janitor, arrived in Spain in November 1937 and was assigned to be Barsky's aide and an ambulance driver.

For Neugass, two facts of the war were inescapable: Hitler and Mussolini were pro-

mingled closely with unsentimental depictions of wounded soldiers. "A sniper got Fred Mowbray of New Orleans in the base of the spine," he writes. "Paralyzed from the waist down, urine accumulating in the kidneys, he begged to be catheterized.... He begged for morphine, which could not be given him. Crying all the more pitifully because he was not delirious, Fred was carried out of the ward and evacuated this morning. I hear that spine cases, sooner or later, all die." Neugass sometimes sounds like a world-weary, Popular Front Raymond Chandler. "The clay complexion of death is international," he writes. "What can you do? Go out and make more dead."

Conversant in Spanish and acquainted with Spain from his travels there before the war, Neugass is periodically able to slip out of his American skin and steal a local perspective of the conflict. During a short respite in Mezquita, a small town near the Aragon front, he is invited to join an impoverished family of twelve for dinner. "I was asked to eat," he writes. "When I looked at the size of the single earthenware jug in the fireplace, I answered that I had already had supper.... The mother lifted the crock from the fireplace and emptied a steaming mass of potatoes." The family insisted that Neugass share their food with them: thirteen people ate off a single plate. When they finished the potatoes, the meal was over.

After dinner, Neugass interviews the father of the family, a landless peasant. Neugass asks the man what political party he belongs to. "*Soy revolucionario, como todos*," he answers. Pressing the point, Neugass asks again to which party he belongs. "*De los matafascistas*.... I believe in the fascist-killer party," the man answers. "But which party is that?" Neugass asks. "That is every political party," the man replies. "What is communism?" Neugass asks, switching tactics. The man replies hesitatingly, "I don't know.... *significa, significa*... tractors!... And the other parties also... communism, socialism, anarchism... it all means... machines for the land!"

The desperation of the peasant was typical of many who toiled at the bottom of Spain's semifeudal agricultural system. Much of the Spanish countryside was divided into enormous agricultural estates called *latifundios*, and the estate owners generally considered their workers to be almost indistinguishable from their other property. Between 1918 and 1921 a series of peasant uprisings erupted in southern Spain. Though

the army and the Guardia Civil eventually put down the laborers' revolt, sporadic strikes and reprisals continued throughout agrarian Spain. The landowners, anxious to subjugate the peasantry, enthusiastically supported Franco's military revolt against the Republic, which had been trying, with limited success, to introduce land reform and break up the *latifundios*. Gen. Emilio Mola, an architect of the rebellion, articulated the fascists' method to regain control over the peasants in a martial law proclamation on the second day of the war: "Re-establishing the principle of authority unavoidably demands that punishments be exemplary both in terms of the severity with which they will be imposed and the speed with which they will be carried out."

Neither the landowners nor the fascist troops needed much encouragement. As the British historian Paul Preston details in a profile of Capt. Gonzalo Aguilera, an estate owner and press officer for Franco, the day before Mola's proclamation Aguilera lined up his workers, randomly selected six and publicly shot them as a warning to the others. (Aguilera's actions are not surprising in light of what he told an AP correspondent about the Spanish masses. "They are slave stock," he said. "They are good for nothing but slaves and only when they are used as slaves are they happy.") Near Córdoba, at the beginning of the war, a landowner shot ten of his workers in retribution for every fighting bull the workers had slaughtered for food during a brief collectivization of his estate. Outside Seville, fascist officers made peasants dig their own graves before shooting them. Just before the peasants were murdered, the officers mocked them. "Didn't you ask for a plot of land?" the officers yelled. "Now you're going to have one, and for ever."

Neugass's memoir is particularly important given the growing revisionist tendency in accounts of the Spanish Civil War published in the past decade. Prominent articles by George Packer in *The New Yorker* and Sam Tanenhaus in *Vanity Fair* echo the sentiments of George Orwell—who in *Homage to Catalonia* described the Soviet-backed purge of the revolutionary militia he'd joined, and cautioned that any postwar Republican government was "bound to be Fascistic." Both Packer and Tanenhaus suggest that Spain would have faced a Stalinist future if the Republic had prevailed, and they praise Orwell as a singular prophet. Packer writes that unlike Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos, "Orwell kept his bearings, neither

Neugass's memoir moves jaggedly between boredom, fleeting triumphs and terror.

viding overt military support for Franco, and the Non-Intervention Agreement signed by the Western democracies, crucially France and Britain, forbade any involvement in the Spanish Civil War, including the sale of arms to the Republic. Italy and Germany were also signatories to the treaty, but they openly defied it: Italy dispatched more than 75,000 professional soldiers to aid Franco, and Germany mobilized pilots and a fleet of ultra-modern bombers. (Responding to Germany and Italy's involvement in the war, the Soviet Union sent military equipment and some 3,000 personnel to aid the Republic.) Neugass's mind drifts to those tactical facts repeatedly, even when his immediate problem is commonplace. "The lack of a tire pump can kill a man as easily as the lack of a helmet. I haven't got one of those either. All of them are up at the lines...or should be," he wrote. "The entire country is organized to strengthen the thin thousand mile dam of dugouts, men and munitions which separate not only the Republic but every democratic nation on earth, from fascism." His metaphor proved prescient; five months after the Republic fell, Hitler invaded Poland.

Neugass's memoir, drawn from a contemporaneous diary, follows the haphazard rhythm of the war, moving jaggedly between boredom, fleeting triumphs and terror. Brief, vivid descriptions of daily life, such as an unpalatable dish of *bacalao* ("tastes like rawhide soaked in glue then boiled in machine oil"),

turning the war into a stage for his own psychodrama nor wilting under the pressure of ambiguous reality." Tanenhaus's piece, "Innocents Abroad," asserts that the traditional view of the Spanish Civil War as a noble fight against fascism is the "last great myth of the 20th-century left" and that the conflict "brutalized and corrupted the idealistic young American volunteers." Like Packer, Tanenhaus praises Orwell as an exception to "the literary rule" and points out that *Homage to Catalonia* sold only 700 copies when it was released in Britain in 1938. In their unqualified admiration for Orwell, however, Packer and Tanenhaus slight the cautionary note in Lionel Trilling's introduction to the first American edition of *Homage to Catalonia*, published in 1952. Orwell, Trilling wrote, "told the truth, and told it in an exemplary way, quietly, simply, with due warning to the reader that it was only one man's truth."

For Packer and Tanenhaus, Orwell's criticisms are backed by a trove of Soviet-held documents (the "Moscow Archives") unearthed after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Particularly influential in the English-speaking world, and cited in Tanenhaus's piece, is a selection of these documents edited by Ronald Radosh, Mary Habeck and Grigory Sevostianov and published in 2001 under the title *Spain Betrayed*. This collection, consisting mostly of private communiqués between Russian military and diplomatic officials in Spain and various officials in Moscow, provides an intriguing glimpse into the Soviet involvement in Spain. Interspersed with the documents are commentaries written by the book's editors. The book asserts that the newly discovered documents prove the Soviet Union "sought to take over and run the Spanish economy, government and armed forces in order to make Spain a Soviet possession."

Yet the documents teem with contradictions (sometimes within the same document) and resist such oversimplified conclusions. Revealing too are the documents the editors chose to exclude. As Helen Graham, a British scholar of the Spanish Civil War, points out in a thoughtful review of *Spain Betrayed*, the editors include only one document from 1939, when a military rebellion against the communist prime minister revealed how little the Soviets actually controlled the army and government of Spain. (Material from the Moscow Archives relating to this late rebellion was published in 1999 by two Spanish academics, Antonio Elorza and Marta Bizcarrando.) Graham is baffled by the lack of any context in the

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editors' commentary. "Professor Radosh and his co-editors leave entirely out of account the broader picture of Republican Spain at war," she writes. "It is as if they see it as a blank screen waiting to be written on by Soviet and Comintern players."

In his *Vanity Fair* article, Tanenhaus writes that several Lincoln deserters, whose names disappear from the Moscow Archives, faced "potential death sentences." But as Peter Carroll, Neugass's editor and the author of a scholarly history of the Lincoln Brigade, notes in a pointed essay called "The Myth of the Moscow Archives," there can be a vast difference between potential and actual. One of the men whom Tanenhaus suspects might have been shot, an African-American soldier named Edward Carter, returned to the United States after fighting in Spain. Carter served in the US Army in World War II and was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Clinton. Carroll, who was one of the first researchers to view the Moscow Archives, stresses the need for skepticism and rigor when drawing on the archives' documents: "Reports sent to the Kremlin by Soviet generals can hardly be taken at face value or treated as statements of policy without considering that reporters serving under Stalin would, to put it mildly, attempt to place themselves in the best light."

The recollections of the surviving Lincoln veterans, who now number only a couple dozen, are the most poignant reminders of the need to heed Trilling's warning. George Sossenkeno, a 90-year-old vet who fought in the anarchist Sébastien Faure Century and was later adopted by the Lincolns, recently told me, "The Soviet Union, with some assistance from Mexico, was the only country which helped the Spanish Republic. They put a lot of money in it. No need to say that they didn't want to have on their side other ideological groups competing with them." At the same time, Sossenkeno feels that the divisions in the Republic were overemphasized and varied widely. He mentioned his anarchist militia as an example: "I was on the Aragon front with Durruti's army [Buenaventura Durruti, the Spanish anarchist leader], and very often we received Russian supplies and weapons." Sossenkeno, like Neugass, believes that the focus on the left's infighting is meant only to obscure the larger betrayal of Republican Spain by the Western democracies.

Jim Benet, a 95-year-old ambulance driver with the Lincolns and a former editor and reporter at *The New Republic*, was particu-

larly unimpressed with Orwell's account. "In the first place he was terribly arrogant," Benet told me. "He wanted it to be about a different thing than it was." Benet feels that Orwell, who understood little Spanish, was missing a key part of the story. ("When I came to Spain, and for some time afterwards, I was not only uninterested in the political situation but unaware of it. I knew there was a war on, but I had no notion what kind of a war," Orwell admits in *Homage to Catalonia*.) "I think the people who were connecting it only with the Russians and Stalin were overreaching," Benet said. "It did seem to us at the time that basically this was a Spanish thing, and of course people took sides. The Russians took sides and the Germans took sides, but basically it was a Spanish conflict."

Still, some of the vets were strongly critical of the Soviet presence in Spain. Maynard Goldstein, a 95-year-old Lincoln volunteer and likely the last American survivor of Jarama, the brigade's first battle, worked closely with the Soviets after he was promoted to intelligence officer. "Our problems were the Russian system of government, of military operation," he told me. "I got into fights with the Russians." After the civil war ended, Goldstein planned to spy on the Nazis in Belgium for the Soviets. He returned to New York and awaited contact from Moscow, but after a year with no word he gave up; instead he became involved in the Communist Party in the Bronx before breaking with the party in 1948 over Tito. Despite his criticism of the Soviets, however, Goldstein doesn't blame them for the Republic's loss. "The fascists were the professional soldiers," he said. "Did we have any great battles? No. It was a question of holding the lines, and that wasn't easy."

Other volunteers, like Neugass, embraced a nonideological, though fierce, antifascism. Neugass describes a scene on the Córdoba front where a group of Lincoln soldiers were attacked at night and forced to withdraw to the next hill, leaving behind several wounded men. Before morning, as the Lincolns were approaching the hill, they saw large fires burning. The wounded Americans were being burned alive. "Not only were there no fascist wounded brought in that night," Neugass writes, "but no prisoners were taken."

Despite those brief moments, Neugass wasn't prone to vengeance. "I am a poor hater of people and a great hater of ideas," he writes. Toward the end of his service in Spain, he describes a moment that sheds light on the meaning of the title he gave his manuscript. In a relatively unscathed vil-

lage near Segura de los Baños, the site of one of the Republic's last-ditch counter-offensives, Neugass manages to buy 250 extremely scarce eggs for the wounded men and the hospital staff. Besides the Republican wounded, the hospital had taken in an injured, delusional fascist prisoner whose hunger complicated the delicate question of distributing the eggs:

A great change came over the fascist this morning. Sana [a nurse] had soft-boiled a quantity of eggs for the patients. As she worked down the ward, carefully feeding liquid gold into the mouths of each man, I wondered what she would do when she got to the fascist. The sheet had come down from his face and he was for once quiet. The eyes of even the half-conscious were on him and on Sana. Would he be fed?... The fascist should be given an egg although the other wounded in the ward look at him as if he were the one who shot them, and perhaps he was.... With the entire ward looking at her, Sana held the fascist head-case in her arms and fed him two soft-boiled eggs. She is not Mary Magdalen and he is not Christ. If this is religion, then I am religious.

Like Guernica, Segura endured a massive, unanswered aerial bombardment, another casualty of the Republic's outmatched forces. Barsky ordered Neugass and other members of the medical team to exhume civilian bodies from the ruins to prevent an outbreak of the plague. While sifting through the rubble, Neugass saw a farmer and his wife kneeling on the floor, staring at their bloodstained infant child. "The child had been suffocated," he writes. "Major B.'s [Barsky] hands can do many things but they cannot repair death. Remembering his first and useless instructions, the mother again and again breathed into the lips of what had been her daughter." Within a month, after a harrowing retreat through fascist territory in which he was nearly killed, the exhausted and emotionally drained Neugass decided to return home to "write what I had seen in Spain."

Two years ago, in the *New York Sun*, Ronald Radosh disputed that the Lincoln veterans went to Spain to save its democracy. "The kind of republic the volunteers sought was a prototype of what the Soviet Union created at the end of World War II," he wrote. But the effort to disparage the vets' motives began even

before Barcelona fell to Franco. In January 1938, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover wrote to FDR's attorney general, Homer Cummings, detailing the warnings of a confidential source regarding the volunteers. According to Hoover, the source told him that the Communist Party was sending men to Spain "to train such individuals in the art of military science so that they can be returned to the United States to lead the vanguard of the revolution in this country." Hoover concluded by urging Cummings to inform Roosevelt of this secret plot.

After the war, the Lincoln veterans were labeled "premature antifascists" by the US military and Hoover's FBI, and countless vets were harassed at work or at home by FBI agents. In the early '40s Edward Barsky started an organization aimed at aiding the hundreds of thousands of Republican refugees who were living in concentration camps in southern France. At the time, the United States was anxious to solidify its bond with the anticommunist Franco. Barsky was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee, but he refused to comply with the subpoena, partly on the grounds that the hearing could expose the names of the refugees. In 1947 Congress held Barsky in contempt; after a series of court battles he was sentenced to six months in prison (he served five) and temporarily stripped of his medical license. The Supreme Court upheld the sentence in an 8-1 decision.

For the Republican refugees, the Supreme Court's ruling was simply a continuation of the West's abandonment of the Spanish Republic. A German officer with the International Brigades described the scene of the refugees' arrival at the French border:

That afternoon the Republican troops came. They were received as though they were tramps.... The Spaniards were asked what was in the haversacks...and demanded that they should be opened. The Spaniards did not understand. Until the last moment they persisted in the tragic error of believing in international solidarity.... The dirty road on which the disarmed men stood was not merely the frontier between two countries, it was an abyss between two worlds. Under the eyes of the Prefect and the generals, the men of the *Garde Mobile* took away the bags and bundles containing the Spaniards' personal belongings and emptied their contents into a ditch filled with chloride of lime. I have never seen such anger and helplessness

as those of the Spaniards. They stood as though turned to stone, and they did not understand.

For the vets it was difficult to leave Spain to the ravages of Franco. Garzón's judicial order accuses Franco and thirty-four accomplices of the disappearance and systematic killing of more than 114,000 people between 1936 and 1952, many of them interred like Lorca in *fosas comunes*. Franco also sent an estimated 1 million political prisoners to jails, concentration camps or to work on forced labor battalions. Like Neugass, Matti Mattson, a 92-year-old former ambulance driver with the Lincolns, knew it was just the beginning. "We said, Just wait, there's another one coming," Mattson told me recently. Mattson left Spain in November 1938, when all the International Brigades were sent home. "It was very tough because the war was still going on and the prime minister decided if he sends us home maybe the Italians and the Germans will be sent home as well," Mattson said. "We had lost a lot of territory and retreated all the way in the Aragon. Republican Spain had been severed in two parts." On April 1, 1939, Franco announced the end of military hostilities. The same day, the United States, which like the other Western democracies remained neutral during the war, recognized Franco's government.

Last October, around the time of the publication of *War Is Beautiful*, Mattson returned to Barcelona for the seventieth anniversary of his departure, the day the Republic called La Despedida, the farewell. At his small, tasteful apartment in Brooklyn, he showed me one tangible provision of the Law of Historical Memory, an application for Spanish citizenship offered by the Spanish government to all surviving members of the International Brigades. But Mattson's eyes glowed much brighter when he recalled La Despedida: how the International Brigades marched on the Diagonal through the city and how he heard La Pasionaria's famous speech urging the volunteers to come back "when the olive tree of peace is in flower." He recalled it all with extraordinary vividness, especially the gratitude of the Spanish people for the precious gift of solidarity. "I never saw anything like it," he said. "People lined up on the sidewalks. All the balconies were full and the windows were full and women had flowers—they'd come running out and give you flowers. After a while there were so many flowers that you couldn't take any more—the flowers were all over the street. It was paved with flowers." ■

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Creatures of the Night

by STUART KLAWANS

No other film this summer has made me so thrilled to be in a theater as Park Chan-wook's *Thirst*. I say this as a confession—because a morally aware adult with responsible tastes cannot excuse, let alone indulge, the feral pleasures set loose in this movie. At least I have company in my guilt. One of the film's two main protagonists feels as awful as I do about participating in the experience. The other has the time of her life, or undeath.

Recognized by scholarly viewers as a modern-dress Korean adaptation of Émile Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*—whatever—*Thirst* is in



Kim Ok-vin as Tae-ju in *Thirst*

FOCUS FEATURES

fact many things: a tale of adultery and murder, a drama of Catholic spirituality, a thriller about medical science gone awry, a satire on provincial life (the hours clacked away in mah-jongg games, the years sighed out in claustrophobic shops and their upstairs apartments). But *Thirst* is always and above all a vampire movie, and as such it provides the best opportunity yet for the director of *Oldboy* and *Lady Vengeance* to express his lavish, grotesque and gleeful talent for bloodletting.

The star of this delirium is Song Kang-ho, who was so delightfully loose-jointed when playing the bleached-blond herodespise-himself of Bong Joon-ho's *The Host* but here moves initially with heavy care, as if each gesture cost him pain from an inner wound. As Sang-hyun, a young hospital chaplain, he suffers from the death all around him, from the apparent futility of his efforts to aid the dying and from a spirit of renunciation that is perhaps too complete. Aspiring to martyrdom—or is it suicide?—Sang-hyun volunteers to be a research patient in an African clinic, where doctors are seeking a cure for a deadly virus that (strangely enough) infects only missionaries. He awaits the agony in his cell, playing Bach's "*Ich habe genug*" on

the recorder; breaks out in pustules; hemorrhages profusely; and then dies on the operating table while receiving a blood transfusion—only to revive.

Still swaddled in bandages to hide the pustules, so he looks more like the Invisible Man than a vampire, Sang-hyun returns to Korea and resumes his hospital duties, now with the additional shame of being popularly thought to be a saint whose prayers have special efficacy. No one has ever survived the virus. How he survived it, and on what terms, does not become clear to him until the full moon, when he is suddenly overcome by a wash of red on the screen, the echoes of energetic copulation on the soundtrack and a flickering montage of wildlife imagery, intercut with pictures of a bandaged Jesus on the cross. By the time the fit passes, Sang-hyun understands that his body cries out for blood—a few swigs of which do wonders for that embarrassing skin problem.

One deeply carnal craving is bad enough for a priest with a perpetually heavy conscience. But a desire even worse than blood lust comes over Sang-hyun next, when chance reintroduces him to an old grammar school acquaintance—a scrawny, grinning, snott-nosed mama's boy—and the man's apparently abject wife, Tae-ju (Kim Ok-vin). She is gorgeous, in a delicate-featured yet pouty way—and also glum, fragile, put-upon and somnambulistic, all of which goes right to Sang-hyun's heart. He doesn't realize that Tae-ju's sleepwalking is actually a conscious ritual of escape, carried out regularly after she practices the best angle for shoving scissors into her husband's snoring mouth. Sang-hyun knows only that Tae-ju, like him, is a lonely creature of the night. He sees nothing wrong with rescuing her (as he imagines it) on one of her nocturnal forays, lifting her off the pavement with his more-than-human strength, then lowering her bare feet into the protection of his worn-out shoes. Charity covers the first physical contact. The contact after that won't be covered at all.

New love, as everyone knows, often brings people shock as well as joy—but rarely a shock so indelible as the one that Chan-wook now puts on the screen, when Tae-ju finds her priest lying on the floor beside a hospital bed, making illicit use of a rerouted IV line. New love also brings a moment when one partner or the other takes command of the exhilara-

tion—but rarely in such a bravura manner as Chan-wook invents for this couple. Standing with Sang-hyun on a rooftop several floors above street level, Tae-ju asks whether he's able to jump down. In response, he wordlessly gathers her in his arms and leaps into the night air, his cassock billowing behind him—at which point you get a close-up of Tae-ju as Sang-hyun would see her, laughing wildly at the magic he has put at her disposal.

By the next time Chan-wook stages a scene on the rooftops, much later in *Thirst*, Tae-ju will have gained that terrible magic for herself, and Sang-hyun will be leaping after her from building to building, horrified at what he's done both for her and to her. But she will not be horrified. Unlike her priest, whose vampirism only sharpens the bite of conscience, Tae-ju will revel in being a predator. If she were not undead, you would think the life force overflowed in her. As for responsible, remorseful, self-restrained Sang-hyun, you'd say his heart was all the more sick with desire for being fastened to an animal that won't die.

This contrasting development between Tae-ju and Sang-hyun has distressed some viewers, who have resisted being carried away by the flood of Chan-wook's images. According to A.O. Scott in his impeccably judicious review in the *New York Times*, "The difference between the lovers is indicative of the film's queasy, quasi-misogynist ideas about eros and ethics." But with due respect for a critic I admire, I will argue that Chan-wook's supposed misogyny is visible only if you're looking at *Thirst* with one eye—the eye that identifies with Sang-hyun. Look with both eyes at once so you also identify with Tae-ju, and you not only lose the misogyny but gain some depth perception.

Tae-ju is, admittedly, a reprehensible character; but that doesn't mean she hasn't suffered, and it doesn't mean she's wrong to reject being a victim. *Thirst* takes the trouble to show her wasting away at work in her mother-in-law's airless kimono shop, and dragging through interminable nights of social boredom in the equally suffocating apartment. While Sang-hyun has been swaddled in bandages, Tae-ju's owners (you can scarcely call them family) have kept her as immobile as a corpse in its winding sheet—so it's no surprise that her pretended sleepwalking is actually a sprint through the deserted streets. She doesn't just have to get out; she has to move. And if she eventually gains the ability to move like no mortal being, that's not her doing but Sang-hyun's. The vampire priest has needed her badly enough to give her power but then, in his anguished, mopey way,

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can't accept the reality that power is what this woman needs. Depending on which eye you're looking with, that makes him either a morally aware adult or a hypocrite.

Thirst is hardly the first film to play this double game with the audience; but it plays the game beautifully and with a brio that requires no apology. You might look for it on the one out-of-the-way screen where it still lingers in your town, its title now shrunk to insignificance amid the newspaper ads, its reflected light washing nightly across empty seats. Secrets are best savored in dark, hidden places.

Money changes hands in the first scene of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's *Lorna's Silence*, and in the second and the third. It's not checks or electronic currency but old-fashioned folding money, the kind still used for paying low-wage workers, buying a few minutes on the telephone with an absent lover, acquiring street drugs, arranging for someone's complicity in murder. As the camera follows the title character through the streets and bars of Liège, through its storefronts and cheap apartments and hospital rooms—in the Dardenne brothers' cinema, the camera always trails along—Lorna becomes enmeshed with all of these functions of ready cash and struggles to get loose of the fatal ones, at greater and greater risk to herself.

A long-faced, serious-browed young Albanian with a unisex haircut (the kind that requires no upkeep), Lorna (Arta Dobroschi) starts out in the film halfway to her dream. By means of a paper marriage to Claudy (Jérémie Renier), a hunched, haggard, almost childlike junkie, she has attained Belgian citizenship and a small bank account. Now all she has to do to get the big wad of bills is stay out of the way while the thug who set her up in this scam (Fabrizio Rongione) provides Claudy with a timely overdose. Lorna will then be free to marry again, this time to a Russian with questionable professional associations, who will pay well to have her new citizenship rub off on him.

It's a lurid premise, of the kind the Dardennes generally favor; and as usual in their flawlessly naturalistic films, it's crude and awkward enough to seem true. I've never known them to compromise their honesty through their choice of a narrative conceit—only by flattering the audience occasionally, by having the protagonists of certain films do just what you think they should. Lorna meets the standard of being honest enough. She does become conscience-stricken over Claudy, despite the contempt she shows for

him early in the film. (When he's detoxing and begs for water, she gives it to him in a bowl set on the floor, as if he were a dog.) His harmlessness and candor get to her, and she softens, as you'd like her to. But her efforts to protect him are not so much admirable as impulsive, willful, masochistic, involving tactics such as mercy sex and blows to her own head. Her fantasies about him, as her plans unravel, become more and more unbalanced. By the end, Lorna is no longer within reach of the audience's moral compass. She's hardly even living in a society.

Lorna's Silence is about the condition of one woman's soul, as the title implies; but it's also about an international economy that's seldom talked about on this level. As the Dardennes see it, most people in this system of exchange are literally locked in, like Claudy, who is practically boxed with a price sticker on his head. A few, like the thug, deal in mobility, whether of goods or of people. (For a front, the thug pretends to be a cabbie.) And some people, like Lorna, come unstuck. She's in motion but with nowhere to go, forced out of the movie's closed spaces but unable to circulate freely. What's she worth? Nothing.

Everything.

Among the questions I can't answer about Lucrecia Martel's *The Headless Woman*: Whose calls does Verónica (Maria Onetto) keep taking on her cellphone and then disconnecting? By paying attention to the cellphone, rather than the deserted road she was speeding along, what has she hit with her Mercedes? How much time passes between the accident and her visit to an emergency room? Between the visit to an emergency room and her checking into a hotel? Had she ever made love to her cousin before? Does her husband know? Does her husband believe what he's saying when he drives her around in circles at night, in impenetrable darkness, and insists she can see that she hit only a dog? Why does she insist back to him that it was a boy? And why, amid such confusion and death and heavy rain, is everyone so preoccupied with the texture of Verónica's bleached hair?

I'm not sure that Martel gives any answers. What I know is that her droll, enigmatic fable about bourgeois discombobulation in the Argentine provinces has the comic timing of Samuel Beckett, the composition and color sense of William Eggleston and the very peculiar paranoid atmosphere of Lucrecia Martel. See for yourself. *The Headless Woman* begins its US theatrical run August 19, at Film Forum in New York City. ■

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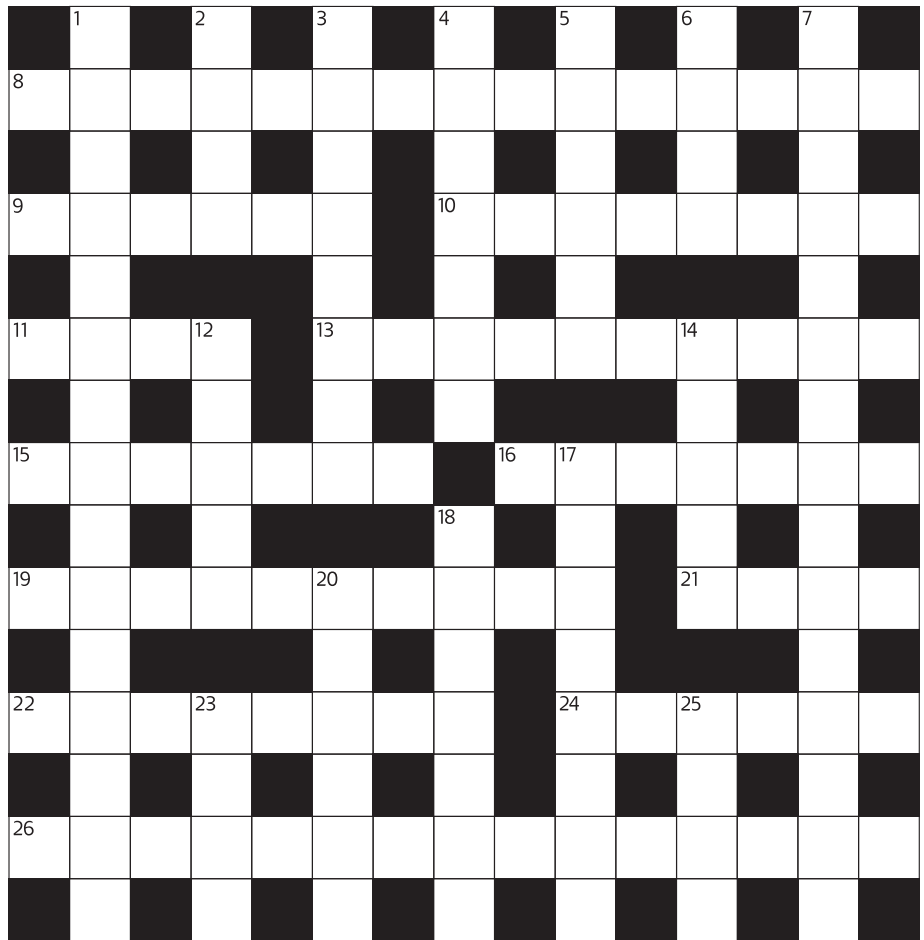
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ACROSS

- 8 It might be rain. (7,8)
- 9 Broken plates are good enough for such as a potato. (6)
- 10 Those muscles you hear about in the drink? (8)
- 11 A hundred fight to make it, but one is taken aback to eat it. (4)
- 13 She may offer you a pillow, with a bit of a tune shot out perhaps, on the curve. (3,7)
- 15 see 4 down
- 16 Uses ruses to bring me back ahead of them. (7)
- 19 The old chestnut of anagrams is this version of carthorses for the players. (10)
- 21 A baseball team is staple in this puzzle. (4)
- 22 It's all right around 5 with the Queen to pull the boat back—but you're trying too hard to do it. (8)
- 24 This said, you can quit talking! (6)
- 26 Reputed bone-breakers remain attached to the beach and a bit of music. (6,3,6)

DOWN

- 1 Where you might find a balance in a meeting place that is very, very, serious. (6,2,7)
- 2 Quit when the mail is scattered! (4)
- 3 Concerning the lands bordering the east coast of the Mediterranean, this should be applicable. (8)
- 4 and 15 across They're not amorous carryings-on in official surroundings, but politicians are familiar with them. (7,2,5)
- 5 What indicates a loud sort of snore here in California? (6)
- 6 Look over things quickly, with a point able to make it. (4)
- 7 Like a bon mot leaving us—according to the bon mot. (2,3,6,4)
- 12 Look at the little clock! (5)
- 14 Tonal composition, but one of those things that could grab you unpleasantly. (5)
- 17 Rubber, of sorts—where to find Boston needs direction to employ the result. (8)
- 18 A mischief-making spirit in German literature. (7)
- 20 The better half for some, striking a sort of pose around us. (6)
- 23 Take possible care of the running? (4)
- 25 You'll find it blowing in the winds! (4)



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For years consumers have only had expensive and ineffective alternatives to achieve younger looking skin. You may have seen other inferior anti-wrinkle products costing hundreds of dollars at some high priced salons. Unlike those pricey and unproven alternatives, the manufacturer of Hydroxatone® is so confident in their anti-aging technology that they are offering a 30-day risk free trial offer...because seeing is believing!



To get your supply of Hydroxatone® risk free, for just a small shipping and processing fee call 888-223-9962. Our operators are available to let you try one of the greatest breakthroughs in wrinkle fighting technology without spending hundreds of dollars.

Call 888-223-9962 to get your Hydroxatone® 30-Day Risk Free Trial Offer Today!
Mention Promotion Code HY100081 for a Free Upgrade!

www.hydroxatonedirect.com